

## **Bullying: top tips for schools**

Kidscape is here to help with bullying. We are here to help children and families going through a bullying situation, and we are here to work with teachers and other professionals to keep children safe. We can only stop bullying by working together.

It is not shameful to say you have witnessed bullying in your school. Bullying can happen anywhere at any time. What matters is that your school prioritises a culture where staff and students care for one another, take action to prevent bullying and always acts swiftly if it happens.

### **What is bullying?**

Bullying is any behaviour that is intended to hurt, is repeated and where it's hard for the person or people on the receiving end to defend themselves (in other words - the bully has the power). Children are most often bullied by other children, but can also be bullied by adults.

### **What does bullying look like?**

Hurtful behaviour takes many forms but children tell us that the most frequent form of bullying is name calling (don't believe the old sticks and stones rhyme - words hurt more than anything). Bullying can also be physical and emotional, and can take place face to face and online (cyberbullying). Interestingly, children tell us that that the face to face stuff is the hardest.

### **Targeting 'difference'**

Children that bully very often target any kind of perceived 'difference'. Sadly this means that disabled children and those with special educational needs, children with any kind of disfigurement, young carers, children in care, children from a minority ethnic background, children living in poverty, children who are bereaved, children with allergies, children who do not conform to gender 'norms' or are exploring their sexuality are very often targets.

### **Difference between bullying and banter**

'Banter', or teasing as we used to call it is not a new phenomenon. It is very often how we form friendships and test relationships, have fun, and occasionally flirt. It is usually between people that know or like each other, such as friends and family. The problem is it can easily slip into hurtful behaviour if we're not careful and a line can be crossed. This is often the case if it picks up on a protected characteristic (e.g. someone's gender or sexuality, their race or culture, age) or if it feels very personal (e.g. your looks, your confidence, your popularity). Teachers need to be clear with students what they will and will not accept and to learn to look for cues that you are

hurting someone rather than being funny. Schools should be particularly vigilant to behaviour that reinforces 'norms' (e.g. 'You are so gay', 'You're a fat git', 'Ginger', 'You're frigid', etc).

## Signs a child may be being bullied

Signs could include a change in a child's behaviour (louder, quieter), scared to go to school or take part in their usual activities, unexplained illness like stomach upsets and headaches, disturbed sleep, bed wetting, injuries and lost or stolen belongings.

## What to do if you think a child is being bullied

- 1) **Listen and watch** Make it clear to children that they can tell you anything and that you will work together to stop a bad situation. Create space through one to one time and circle time. Really listen. Watch their body language, be mindful of classroom and peer group dynamics and if they don't open up create opportunities until they're ready.
- 2) **Ask other people.** It can be helpful to ask parents and carers, siblings and other children whether they are picking up on anything. This has to be managed carefully so it doesn't expose the child or your concerns. Ask other teachers and staff. See if they are noticing changes in the child.

## We have a bullying situation – what do I do

- 1) **Reassure.** Let the child know this is not their fault and together you will sort it out.
- 2) **Record.** Make a note of what has happened where, with who, and for how long. Then ask them or their parent/carer to keep a diary of events.
- 3) **Ask the child what they need from you.** Ask them how it is making them feel, and any practical steps you can take to help stop the bullying. It's important that the child feels in control of the situation. They may be very fearful of the impact of telling you (e.g. being called a snitch) so work out the best action together.
- 4) **Then act quickly.** Your focus should be on making sure the bullying stops. Follow up with all children involved, explore what has taken place and action needed to stop it happening again. The other child or children may deny what has taken place, may share that it has been in retaliation – and will very often have an alternative story. The important message is that you will not tolerate bullying of any kind, that someone has been hurt and that something needs to change. Agree with all children what the next steps will be and a time when you will check in.
- 5) **Record the incident and your action.** Good record keeping is vital for keeping a track on repeated incidents and evidencing that you have taken appropriate action. Ofsted will ask to see evidence of this.
- 6) **Make sure the child is safe.** If they have been harmed in any way or at risk of harm do not send them into a situation where they are not safe. Their safety comes first. The school has a legal duty to keep them safe and you must act now. If they have been assaulted or threatened with harm you should follow the school safeguarding policy.

6) **Give further support** What other strategies can you put in place to support all children involved longer term? Are there teachers, other adults in the school or particular pupils that can make themselves available to support and mentor the target of bullying? If you have concerns about the impact on the child's physical or mental health then follow up with the appropriate services. You may also want to refer the family to Kidscape ZAP workshops to help build their confidence and esteem. Does the child or children displaying bullying behaviour need a longer term intervention? How can they be supported to use their power for good and to help other students rather than causing hurt?

7) **Learn from each incident** Consider actions you need to take as a school to stop this happening again. For example, if bullying keeps happening in the same place you may need to increase levels of supervision. If the behaviour is repeatedly targeted at a certain demographic of the pupil population (e.g. children who do not conform to gender norms, disabled children and those with special educational needs) then you will need to work on your wider culture of inclusion. If much of the behaviour is online at the weekend or on week nights you may need to work with the whole school community including parents and pupils to reinforce the impact of cyberbullying and steps you can all take to stop it.

8) **Help – a parent has submitted a formal complaint.** The more you work proactively with parents and carers to be clear on action you take to prevent and respond to bullying the less likely this is to happen. This includes working together to agree next steps, keeping a record of events, and regularly checking in with the family. If they do complain, try not to let it get 'personal' or heated. What needs to remain central is the safety of the child and the need for the bullying to stop, and if necessary seek external support.

## Practical steps

Kidscape helps to build the confidence and esteem of children and families going through a bullying situation. Children that bully others look for what they see as weaknesses in other people. This means they will very often target a child that looks shy or unsure of themselves. We teach children assertiveness skills such as holding a strong posture, making eye contact, learning to say 'no' with confidence, refusing to give the person bullying you the reaction they want. We run free ZAP workshops across the country that can teach these skills.

[www.kidscape.org.uk](http://www.kidscape.org.uk)

## What about children that bullying others?

Children bully for many reasons. Sometimes it is because they are popular and well liked and want to hold that position, or it can be the opposite - they are feeling hurt and insecure and take it out on others. Sometimes children who are being bullied then bully others. We are all capable of bullying behaviour. Help the child to see the hurt they have caused and be clear it needs to stop. Talk to them about why they were doing it and explore what may have been driving the behaviour. Be alert to any potential safeguarding issues (e.g. the child is experiencing violence in the home or violence from peers). Teach them positive ways they can make friends and keep friends without hurting other people. Encourage them to turn it around by now being the person that sticks up for other people who are sad or lonely. They can use their power for good!

## **What are the key things we can put in place as a school to take action against bullying**

### **Ethos and climate**

Many people will say they can tell what a school will be like just by entering Reception (or the staff room)! Make sure that you are clear about your values; publicise expected standards at every opportunity, demonstrate in your actions that you listen and you care, expect respectful and caring behaviour from all members of your community at all times, don't allow aggressive or shaming behaviour, take a zero tolerance approach to any form of name calling or demeaning comments, celebrate difference and make sure every single member of your community feels welcome, loved and cherished.

### **Guidance from the top**

Bullying remains one of the key concerns of children and their parents and carers. Make sure that there is a governor and named member of the senior leadership team who leads on bullying prevention and response. Think about how this aligns with your safeguarding and behaviour policies.

### **Trained staff**

Make sure all members of the staff team are trained in safeguarding and anti-bullying strategies. Review this training regularly.

### **Clear policy and strategy**

Work with the whole school community including staff, pupils and parents to agree your definition of bullying and what you will do to stop it. Make sure this is shared with all and is in a language everyone can understand. Share your policy on your website and make sure every member of the community signs up to it. Make sure your strategy includes targets for progress and measure against these. Celebrate your successes together but acknowledge where you need to learn and change.

### **Consult**

It is vital that you regularly consult with pupils and parents and carers to measure levels of bullying and pupil wellbeing, assess what's going well and what needs to change. We recommend surveying each year and encouraging pupils to set up their own anti-bullying task groups to lead on school action.

### **Reporting routes**

It is vital that you are a listening school. This means being very clear who to report bullying to and making sure pupils and families feel like they are listened to if they report. It can also help to set up online reporting schemes and have drop boxes for pupils who may be reluctant 'to tell'. Be particularly alert to children who may find it hard to share how they are feeling.

## **Response strategies**

Make sure the whole school staff team knows what action to take if they witness, or are informed of a bullying situation. Share with pupils and parents the action you will take in advance as part of your anti-bullying policy. Take swift action and have a range of strategies for both supporting the child experiencing the bullying, and dealing with the bullying behaviour.

**For more information on Kidscape, including our CPD training for teachers and professionals and guidance for parents and children visit [kidscape.org.uk](https://www.kidscape.org.uk).**

