

Bullying: top tips for parents and carers

Kidscape is here to help children and families. Whether your child is starting school for the first time or changing schools and you are worried about bullying, or you are going through a bullying situation and unsure what to do, we are here to help.

Preparing your child for school life

1. **Try not to be overly anxious.** This is a tough one but the majority of children have a good time at school; are able to deal with challenges when they arise and go on to be happy young adults.
2. **You've got this.** If challenges arise then you have the strength and skills to support your child. If you are unsure what to do there are lots of people that can help you. Kidscape are also here for you.
3. **Practice.** Talk to your child about how to make friends (e.g say hello, ask people about themselves, be kind), and what it means to be a good friend (e.g. friends won't hurt you). Role play what you would do if someone made a mean comment or hurt you. Reinforce that they have the power to take action and tell them over and over again that you are there for them.
4. **Teach kindness.** Your child is watching your every move so think about how you talk about other people. Encourage them to be the child that sticks up for others, welcomes everyone into their games, loves who they are and loves other people.

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 bullying looks like

Hurtful behaviour takes many 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.

Signs your child may be being bullied

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

What to do if you think your child is being bullied

- 1) **Don't panic.** It is horrible if you suspect your child is being bullied but you will get through this with the right support. Your child needs you to be calm. Think cool, capable warrior parent.
- 2) **Create space to talk.** We all lead busy hectic lives but children need you to be there if they are going to tell you what's going on. Sometime a direct question works, but other times it may be helpful to go for a walk, a drive or out for food together and gently ask how they are feeling about life and school. Really listen. Watch their body language and if they don't open up on that occasion keep creating opportunities until they're ready.
- 3) **Ask other people.** It can be helpful to ask friends of other children whether they are picking up on anything. This has to be managed carefully so it doesn't turn into playground gossip but other children can be the best sources of information. Ask their teacher. See if they are noticing changes in your child.

My child is being bullied - what do I do?

- 1) **Reassure.** Let your 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 keep a diary of events.
- 3) **Ask your child what they need.** Ask them how it is making them feel, and what they most need from you. It's important your child feels in control of the situation. They may be very fearful of the impact of telling others (e.g. being called a snitch) so work out the best action together.
- 4) **Tell the school.** Your child may be very fearful of this so agree together who is the best person to approach and what you need them to do. The focus should be on making sure the bullying behaviour stops.
- 5) **Keep your child 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 they must work with you. If they have been assaulted or

threatened with harm you can also contact your local children's services team (at the council) and/or the police.

6) **Consider who else can help.** Your child needs support at this time so help them think about people in school who are on their side and can help them. This may be other children or teachers they like and trust. Encourage them to take part in activities that make them feel good about themselves and have friendships outside of school.

7) **Don't be afraid to see your GP.** If the bullying has impacted on your child's physical or mental health (e.g they are very scared or anxious) talk to your GP.

8) **Help – the school aren't taking action.** Try not to get angry – be clear that you need to work together until the bullying situation stops. If you need to take it further follow the school complaints process and contact your local children's services team at the council. The school and the council have a legal duty to keep your child safe from harm. The Department for Education also have details on how to escalate a complaint depending on the type of school your child attends. It can be helpful to refer to the Department for Education documents Prevent and Tackling Bullying in Schools and Keeping Children Safe in Education to show that you know your child's rights.

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

What if my child is bullying others?

Again, don't panic. 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 =your child to see the hurt they have caused and be clear it needs to stop. Talk to them about why they are doing what they are doing and 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!

Help! The bullying is online.

If your child is being bullied through social media, games or websites it can feel hard to handle or escape from. You may not be familiar with the sites they are using or games they are playing and unsure what to do.

- 1) **Look out for the signs.** If your child is anxious or upset after being online this may be a sign they are being cyberbullied.
- 2) **Talk to them** about what cyberbullying is (people deliberately hurting you) and encourage your child not to retaliate. This may mean leaving conversations or taking a short break before going back online.
- 3) **Reassure, record and report.** Reassure your child that everything will be okay and you will sort it out together. Try not to get angry if your child has posted or shared something that has led to the bullying. We all make mistakes and this is an opportunity to reinforce how important it is to think carefully before sharing. If the cyberbullies are children from your child's school then it's important to keep a record of events and share with the school.
- 4) **Report online.** Most platforms have ways that you can report bullying behaviour. For advice and tips on reporting bullying and harmful behaviour online you can visit internetmatters.org or www.childnet.com

For more information on Kidscape ZAP workshops and advice and guidance for parents and children visit kidscape.org.uk.

Kidscape also run a Parent Advice Line Monday - Thursday from 9am - 12pm. Call 020 7823 5430.

