

Helping Your Child to Deal with Bullying

A Guide for Parents

Bullying is at best unpleasant, at worst damaging, whenever it happens and for whatever reason. Having strategies to cope with it will give your child skills that will be valuable throughout their lives. If your child is being bullied, consider trying some of these ideas...

Talk to your child at their level about the difference between passive, aggressive and assertive behaviour. Teach your child to walk into a room with a straight back, head held high. Talk about moving away from people who may cause problems, keeping a calm, peaceful face and demeanour – even if they may not be feeling this way inside! If you feel comfortable, try a little bit of role play – act out a situation where your child needs to practise staying calm. If you aren't comfortable doing this, ask a friend or family member who is.

Teach your child avoidance strategies – in other words, don't be where the bully is! If this isn't possible, try acting out a situation where you pretend to be the bully and your child has to walk past you, still keeping that calm demeanour but with a neutral expression. Bullies trade on the reaction they get – if there is none, they lose their power.

Teach your child to protect their feelings from name-calling. A useful technique is to imagine 'catching' the unkind words, throwing them in the bin and replacing them with positive words. Practise by saying (for example) 'I don't like you!' in the character of a bully. Your child pretends to catch the words and throw them in the bin, and then says, 'I like myself.' Practising this at home will help them to imagine doing it in tough situations elsewhere.

Persist in seeking support. Teachers and schools are incredibly busy. No teacher wants bullying to go on, but you may need to keep in close touch with your child's teacher to ensure that support is being given where it is needed.

If you are worried that your child may have suffered longer-term effects as the result of bullying, ask the school to support you to seek a referral to a specialist counsellor.

Perhaps most importantly, protect your child's self-esteem by constantly reminding them that they are loved and cherished by the people that matter most – their friends and family.

Reassure your child that the bullying is not their fault.

Help your child to practise speaking up – saying 'That wasn't nice,' or 'That hurt my feelings,' or simply just to look the bully in the eye and say 'Stop!' Tell your child that if they don't feel safe speaking up like this, they should seek help from an adult.

Challenge any disrespectful or unkind teasing, language or behaviour at home, pointing out that it is only funny if both sides find it so.

Ask your child if there is anyone in their class or friendship group that they feel could be their buddy – someone they could stick with that would support them in tricky situations. Work with your child's teacher to see if this could be a solution.

Support your child's self-esteem in areas where they have talents and abilities, or perhaps encourage them to take up a new hobby, sport or activity.