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Information Advice and Support Kent

A service for Special Educational Needs and Disabilities
Helping you to make informed choices



Bullying

This leaflet explains the definition of bullying and gives some examples of strategies to support your child.

Bullying – there is no legal definition of bullying. However, it is usually defined as behaviour that is:

- *Repeated*
- *Intended to hurt someone either physically or emotionally*
- *Often aimed at certain groups, for example because of race, religion, gender, or sexual orientation*

It takes many forms and can include

- *Physical assault*
- *Teasing*
- *Making threats*
- *Name calling*
- *Cyberbullying – bullying via a mobile phone or online (for example email, social networks, and instant messenger)*

Your school should have its own policy to stop bullying

(<https://www.gov.uk/bullying-at-school/bullying-a-definition>)

Bullying and the Law

- Some forms of bullying are illegal and should be reported to the police. These include:
- Violence or assault
- Theft
- Repeated harassment or intimidation, for example name calling, threats and abusive phone calls, emails, or text messages,
- Hate crimes

Call 999 if you or someone else is in immediate danger.

Who might it affect?

Any child or young person can be bullied and for any reason. If they are seen or appear as different in some way or are seen as an easy target. This may be because of gender, race, ethnic background, sexual orientation, culture, disability, appearance, home life/family, are shy or timid.

Even popular children/young people can be bullied as others may be jealous of them and what they have.

Bullying may include hitting, spitting, pushing, name calling, gossip, spreading rumours, hand gestures, threatening, humiliating, or intimidating behaviour, ignoring, excluding, or isolating someone, constant putting them down or criticizing them, manipulating them to do things they do not want, abusive messages or images.

Signs of bullying

There is no single sign that may indicate that a child or young person is being bullied, but some things to watch for could include:

- Personal belongings getting 'lost' or damaged.
- Unexplained physical injuries such as bruises, nail marks, or teeth marks.
- Sudden unexpected changes in behaviour, such as being nervous, flinching, losing confidence, becoming distressed or withdrawn.
- Not wanting to go to school, truanting or mysterious or sudden illnesses, stomach, or headache.
- Problems with eating, sleeping, stealing money (to pay the bully).
- Becoming aggressive, or bullying others themselves.

Impact and effects of bullying

Bullying can have a long-term affect upon a child and can affect adult life. At its worst, bullying has led to self-harm and even suicide.

Children and young people who are bullied may develop mental health problems such as anxiety, depression, self-harm, selective mute, suspicious of others, fewer friends, isolated, less trusting, or may even become a bully themselves.

All children who are affected by bullying can suffer harm – whether they are bullied, they bully others or they witness bullying.'

NSPCC.org.uk

Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying is bullying online or via a mobile phone, via social networks or even via gaming. It is bullying that can follow the child/young person anywhere that they go and at any time.

This type of bullying can include sending abusive or threatening text messages, creating images or photos, and then sharing them, excluding from online gaming, or friendship groups/chat rooms, creating hate sites/groups about a specific child/young person, creating and voting on poll sites, setting up fake accounts, hijacking and duplicating someone's identity to cause mischief or embarrassment, sexting, encouraging to share explicit images or self-harm.

Support for children experiencing bullying:

Whether the child/young person is in your care or someone known to you, you may experience a huge mixture of emotions. It is vital that you keep calm, explain to them what bullying is and it is ok to feel the way they do, they have not done anything wrong, listen carefully to what they say, and check in with them regularly, you may be their safe person.

Schools and the law

By law, all state (not private) schools must have a behaviour policy in place that includes measures to prevent all forms of bullying among pupils. It will say what will happen if pupils break the rules or misbehave. This is also an Ofsted requirement.

This policy is decided by the school. All teachers, pupils and parents must be told what it is.

Schools and teachers have certain powers to enable them to promote good behaviour, maintain discipline and tackle bullying.

Schools should tackle bullying at the earliest opportunity and not allow it to escalate to a point where a pupil suffers emotional or physical distress. Schools should support the bullied child.

Anti-discrimination law

Schools must also follow anti-discrimination law. This means staff must act to prevent discrimination, harassment, and victimisation within the school. This applies to all schools in England and Wales, and most schools in Scotland.

Reporting bullying

Children and young people should report bullying to their school - or someone they trust if it happens outside school, for example in a club or online. They may need the support of their parent, carer or a trusted adult, to do this.

Schools – Managing bullying

School staff will deal with bullying in different ways, depending on how serious the bullying is.

They might deal with it in school, for example by disciplining bullies, or they might report it to the police or social services.

Any discipline must take account of special educational needs or disabilities that the pupils involved may have.

Outside of school

Head teachers (state schools only) have the power to make sure pupils behave outside of school premises, for example on public transport or in a town centre. School staff can also choose to report bullying to the police or local authority.

Schools should make it clear that whilst a student is wearing the school's uniform, they are representing that school, so they are expected to comply with school behaviour policy.

The Department for Education's guidance for preventing and tackling bullying states that "where bullying outside the school is reported to school staff, it should be investigated and acted on." (p6)

www.assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/623895/Preventing_and_tackling_bullying_advice.pdf

Contacting the school

Primary or junior school –

Speak to the class teacher and explain your worries in a friendly non-confrontational way.

Here are some questions that you can consider asking:

- how your child is getting on with others in class and raise any issues of conflict with other children.
- has the teacher noticed that your child seems unhappy and isolated and is being excluded from games in the playground or regularly not having a partner to work with in class.
- Could the teacher keep an eye on the situation and let you know if they have any concerns.
- What does the teacher suggest would be the best way of sorting it out, perhaps the supervisors could take a more active role in the playground by keeping an eye on your child and ensuring that children are not excluded from games.
- Would the school consider introducing "friendship seats" or a "buddy bench" if they do not already, where younger children can go if they have nobody to play with. Other pupils can ask them to join their games and the supervisors can spot whether one child is on their own too often.

Secondary school

Secondary schools may not be aware that there are some areas of the school pupils feel unsafe, the toilets often come into this category.

By telling the head of year or pastoral support where the bullying is happening, supervision can be increased so that the bullies are caught red handed, meaning that your child cannot be accused of telling tales.

At this stage it can be helpful to try to increase your child's circle of friends by inviting a few children home regularly, to forge stronger friendships or arrange social activities or get your child to join clubs or take up a new hobby to promote friendships.

If bullying continues you can ...

- Keep a diary of what your child says is happening. This should include dates, times, and details of the incident together with any witnesses.
- Write a note to the class teacher, pastoral support, or head of year, explaining that the problem is still unresolved and ask for their support in helping to tackle this.
- Suggest that contact between the bully and your child is monitored and limited, perhaps by the bully moving to another table or set.
- Ask for your letter to be put onto your child's school file, together with a note of action taken.
- Ask for a follow-up meeting after a couple of weeks to discuss how things are going.

That often does the trick, but if not, it is time to write to the head teacher, outlining everything that has gone on, and including evidence from the diary to back up your complaint.

Schools have a duty of care and allowing a child to be continually bullied when the school has been alerted to the problem could be seen as a breach of that duty.

You can [complain about a school](https://www.gov.uk/complain-about-school) if you think it has not dealt with your concerns. <https://www.gov.uk/complain-about-school>

School refusal

If your child cannot face school because of unresolved bullying, ask the Local Authority Inclusion and attendance officer to intervene with the school.

You could also ask your doctor if a referral to a specialist like a psychologist for counselling would help.

You could ask if your child could have access to a particular named key person that they trust so they know they have someone and somewhere safe to go. You could also ask whether a buddy could be arranged for your child to help them settle back in.

It may also be possible to arrange a phased return to school where your child attends for a few hours a day to build up confidence to return full time.

Cyberbullying

New search powers included in the Education Act 2011 have given teachers stronger powers to tackle cyber-bullying (via text message or the internet) by providing a specific power to search for an image on a mobile phone if it is likely to be used to cause harm.

Schools can ban **mobile phones** from the premises if they want to. In certain circumstances, the head teacher or an authorised member of school staff can search the content of any mobile phone/computer your child takes into school if they think there is good reason to do so.

(Bullying UK)

Useful links

<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/what-is-child-abuse/types-of-abuse/bullying-and-cyberbullying/>

<https://www.anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk/tools-information/if-youre-being-bullied/find-help-and-support>

<https://www.childline.org.uk/info-advice/bullying-abuse-safety/types-bullying/>

<https://youngminds.org.uk/find-help/feelings-and-symptoms/bullying/>

<https://www.bullying.co.uk/>

<https://www.kidscape.org.uk/>

<https://www.gov.uk/bullying-at-school>

Where to get further information and advice.

You can contact **IASK Helpline** see below.

For information about SEND services and Kent County Council's process and procedures see **SEND Information hub - KCC SEND Local Offer** link:

<https://www.kent.gov.uk/education-and-children/special-educational-needs>

Notes.....

On request, this information can be provided in alternative formats.

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