



KEEP AN EYE ON IT

It is not always easy for adults to recognise the signs that may tell them a child or young person is either **bullying** or **being bullied** – what might they be doing, saying or feeling? How can parents and carers best keep an eye on whether **bullying** is part of their children's lives?

The Anti-Bullying Alliance and NASUWT – The Teachers' Union wanted to understand more about what adults need to know to help them support children and young people. We asked members of the Young Anti-Bullying Alliance for their help.



Understanding bullying

Bullying is when one person or a group deliberately hurts another individual or group. This is usually more than a one-off incident and can be both physical and psychological.

Why bullying happens

Here are some reasons why people may bully.

Difference (You are different from me or us) due to your: appearance; ethnicity; gender or sexuality; religion/fait; being 'in care'; being a young carer.

Weakness (You're weaker than me or us) due to your: disabilities; special educational needs; age; size; not being a member of our group.

'It happened to me' (I was bullied when I was younger; it is part of growing up; I am the strong one now; I can get away with it).

No one will believe you if you complain about bullying: 'bullying doesn't happen here'.

What form does bullying take?

It can take the form of:

- physical bullying – hitting, stealing, damaging property, name-calling, threats or isolation
- verbal and non-verbal or psychological bullying – direct abuse or indirect bullying via others
- cyberbullying – it has the same effect as verbal / psychological bullying but takes place via mobile phones, email or texting.

What behaviour does it include?

Bullying can include:

- name calling
- spreading hurtful stories
- excluding someone from groups and breaking up friendships
- demeaning comments about gender, culture, religion or sexuality
- demeaning comments about a disability or illness
- taking possessions or money

- sending hurtful texts, web messages or silent phone calls
- hitting, pushing or kicking.

If a young person is being bullied

Many children who are experiencing bullying do not tell anyone. So what are the signs to look for that might indicate that bullying is happening?

Remember that any of these feelings may have other causes – so quiet, calm discussion and really good listening is vital for understanding what is really happening.

What may they be feeling?

A young person who is being bullied may feel:

- pain or hurt
- weak and powerless to make things better
- that it may be their fault
- fear
- isolation
- less confident
- anxious about making it worse if they tell someone.

What may they be doing?

They may:

- show signs of illness or pretend to be ill
- skip lessons at school
- avoid attending particular places
- do less well in schoolwork / homework or lack concentration
- have their possessions damaged or stolen
- blank out others – withdrawing from relationships with friends or family
- become less 'chatty' – and be more clingy or aggressive
- avoid taking phone calls, using their mobile phone or the internet.

How may they be affected in the community and at home?

- Before their school day, they may have headaches, stomachaches or other illnesses.

- They may show signs of serious conditions – anxiety, depression or even self-harm.
- They may arrive home with possessions missing or damaged; unexplained bruises or cuts.

There may be changes in their:

- journey routes or times – especially after school
- friendship groups
- behaviour towards family or friends
- sleep patterns, signs of disturbance or bed wetting.

What might they be saying?

They may say:

- friends are not talking to them
- they need to be driven to or from school
- they need more money
- they have lost their appetite
- they have lost their dinner money
- they hate going to that lesson / going on that bus journey / lessons with those pupils.

If a young person is bullying others

What may they be feeling?

They could be feeling:

- superior to others
- a (heightened) sense of self-esteem
- that they are less likely to be bullied by others
- relief that they are not the one being picked on.



What may they be doing?

They may:

- have more money
- have 'presents' from another child
- be doing less well in school, sports or clubs because they are getting their kicks elsewhere OR others may let them 'win' more because they are the powerful one
- expect 'respect' from others
- come in later from school
- keep changing their use of mobiles or websites – and may be more secretive.

What might they be saying?

The language used when bullying people may be local and change quickly. If in doubt, ask what the words they are using actually mean. You may hear, in one form or another:

- 'we hate their sort'
- 'she' (when it's a 'he') and 'he' (when it's a 'she'), that is, when a young person questions the gender identity of another
- racist / sexist / homophobic remarks
- questioning someone's sexuality
- violent or aggressive language
- 'serves them right' and / or 'it's only a joke'
- words suggesting that someone was a target for text or internet bullying.

SPOTLIGHT ON:

Young people with physical or learning disabilities

Some young people may be particularly vulnerable to bullying for a range of reasons related to their specific needs. The key professional working with the young person needs to be engaged in dealing with the bullying. Parents and carers may need extra help from support workers to understand what is happening and how to support their child.



Think before you act

Adults need to recognise the emotions *they* feel about this situation. You may feel anger, hurt, guilt, helplessness or fear. Your own memories of being a child may help you empathise and find solutions or get in the way. So *think about how you feel before reacting* – or you may not be able to help as much as you want.

If a young person is being bullied

Your key role is listening, calming and reassuring that the situation can get better when action is taken.

Provide a quiet, calm, safe place where they can talk about what is happening.

Make sure they know that your first concern is for their health and well-being.

Ask what it is that the young person wants to happen.

Help identify the skills the young person has at their disposal to solve the problems.

Discuss it with your child's school.

They may worry what you think of them or think you may be angry with them, so listen carefully – and show that you are hearing by 'playing back' to them what you hear.

Assure them that the bullying is not their fault and that you are there to support them.

Remind them of the support they can have from family and friends.

Help them to identify choices available to them and the next steps to take.

Make clear how much you value and love them.

Remember that you may feel pressure to take action, sometimes any action, but this may be unhelpful if you do not have a clear and full view of the facts – or what your child wants.

Above all they need to know you are there if they need you.

If it is more serious

Some bullying is so serious that other steps need to be taken. Seek advice – online, from school, local authority children’s services, local voluntary groups (check the local authority services directory) – so that you can:

- help understand whether it is bullying
- check out the steps you’ve taken so far
- keep a record and think about what actions can be taken.

Agencies that should be involved in the more serious cases

- Children’s Services for child protection or safeguarding issues.
- Child Exploitation and Online Protection Services if illegal online activity is taking place.
- The Police – if there may be criminal or anti-social behaviour actions taking place, such as harassment, hate crime or breaking the law on phones or the internet.

If a young person is bullying someone

It may be difficult to believe that a young person is bullying someone, but such behaviour must be challenged. Bullying is sometimes a reaction to a temporary event in a child’s life – such as bereavement or separation (for example, a family divorce).

Get them to talk about their emotions and about the feelings of the person they are bullying.

Identify any underlying cause of their bullying.

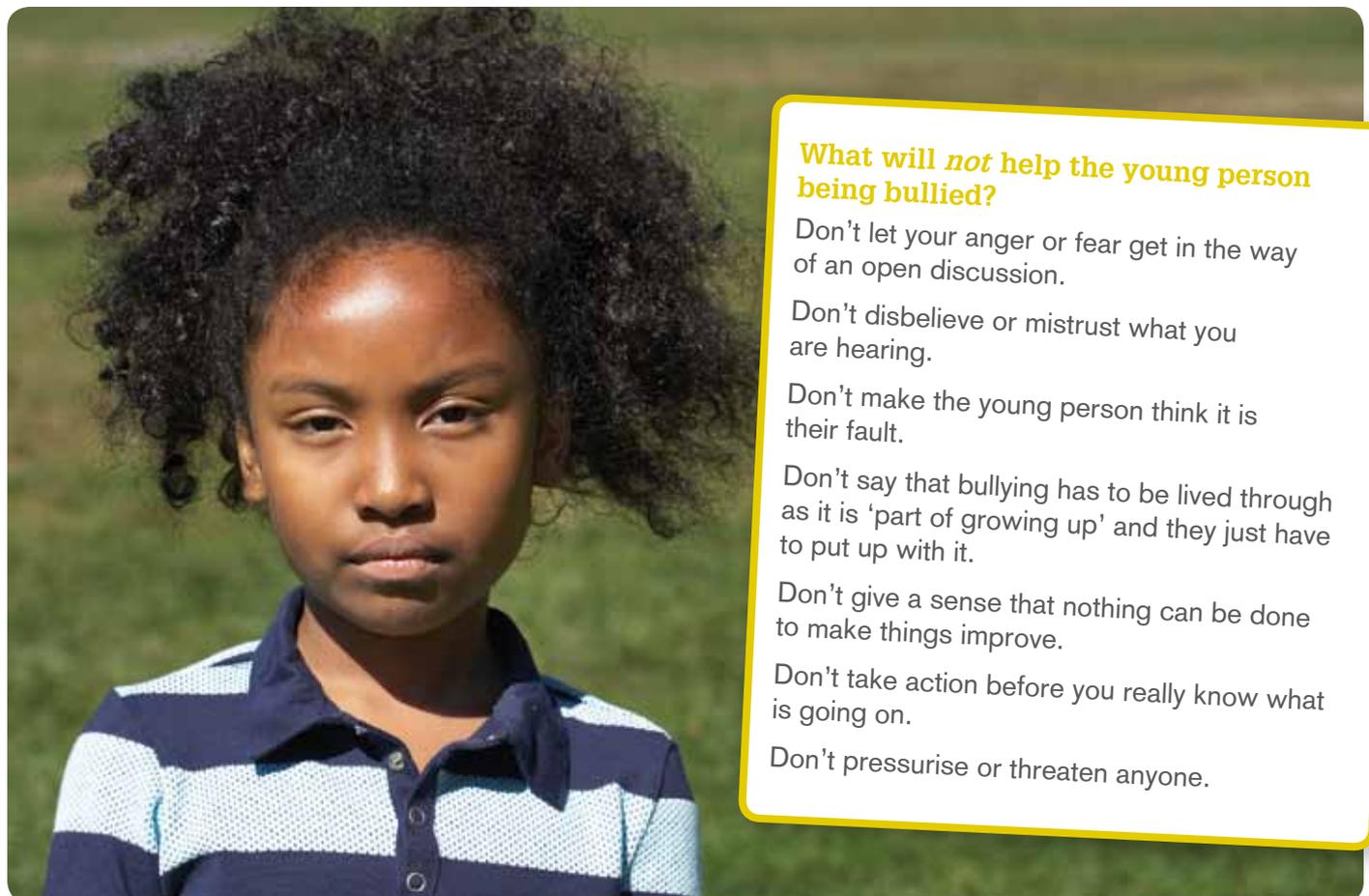
Discuss it with your child’s school.

Challenge any excuses given for the bullying behaviour.

Stress that they are responsible for their own actions.

Assure them of your support to help sort out the problems.

Consider the influence of any other child or adult who may be a driver of the bullying behaviour.



What will *not* help the young person being bullied?

Don’t let your anger or fear get in the way of an open discussion.

Don’t disbelieve or mistrust what you are hearing.

Don’t make the young person think it is their fault.

Don’t say that bullying has to be lived through as it is ‘part of growing up’ and they just have to put up with it.

Don’t give a sense that nothing can be done to make things improve.

Don’t take action before you really know what is going on.

Don’t pressurise or threaten anyone.



Help and support

What to tell a young person facing bullying?

Be calm.

Do not do or say anything aggressively.

Keep a note or a diary of what is happening.

Be confident – you have done nothing to deserve this.

Be assertive.

You could say 'This is not funny. This is bullying. This is wrong'.

Friends are there, ready to help.

Think who can help you – young people or adults.

Seek help.

Say to someone 'Please would you watch what is happening here' and ask them to help you report the incident.

Report the incident to an adult.

SPOTLIGHT ON: Cyberbullying

This is what the Young Anti-Bullying Alliance said that adults should know about cyberbullying and how to help.

Be discrete: but the first duty of the adults is to protect children.

Don't jump to conclusions: but don't ignore the problem.

Monitor phone use.

Watch for calls not being answered or short calls.

Find out more about the social networking sites and mobile phone companies your children use and how to use them safely.

Listen out for possibly harmful nicknames being used.

Use a web search engine (names or nicknames) if you suspect cyberbullying is taking place – but beware the danger of wrong identity.

Note that phone companies and social networking sites have helpdesks for dealing with malicious messages.

Where can a child or young person get more information and help?

A child or young person needs the support of those adults closest to them and that of other adults who have a relationship of trust or authority with them. All schools should take action to prevent bullying. There may be local authority support, too.

Some national sources of support

Childline

www.childline.org.uk
Tel 0800 11 11

Mencap

Supporting young people with a learning disability and their families and carers
www.mencap.org.uk
Tel 020 7454 0454

Where can adults get help to support a young person?

Parentline Plus

www.parentlineplus.org.uk
Tel 0808 800 2222
For support for parents

NSPCC helpline

For worries about a vulnerable child
www.nspcc.org.uk
Tel 0808 800 5000

Kidscape

www.kidscape.org.uk
A helpline for parents and carers of bullied children
Tel 08451 205 204
Monday–Friday, 10am–4pm

Advisory Centre for Education

www.ace-ed.org.uk
Advice for parents and children on all school matters
Tel 0808 800 5793

Children's Legal Centre

www.childrenslegalcentre.com
Free legal advice on all aspects of the law affecting children and young people
Tel 01206 873820

For adults working with young people

CEOP Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (police agency) www.ceop.gov.uk
Tel 0870 000 3344

The Anti-Bullying Alliance

Brings together over 60 organisations committed to stopping bullying
www.anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk

NASUWT

Provides information, advice and guidance to teachers on tackling bullying in school
www.teachersunion.org.uk

Your local authority (council)

This may have specific help for parents and children and young people. For example, there may be:

- an anti-bullying specialist team
- a confidential reporting line for children and young people
- access to personal support.

Department for Children, Schools and Families

This government department has produced comprehensive guidance for schools and out-of-school settings on tackling all forms of bullying:

Safe to Learn (Schools)

www.teachernet.gov.uk/wholeschool/behaviour/tacklingbullying/safetolearn/

Safe from bullying (Out-of-School settings)

www.dcsf.gov.uk/everychildmatters/resources-and-practice/IG00363

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Young people's thoughts on bullying

'It is not just one-on-one - that's the point. We know you can have bystanders - who can make the difference in either encouraging or stopping the bullying.'

'I want adults to know what is happening to me in cyberspace. I want them to take an interest. I'll let them know if they overstep my private things - but better that way than them thinking it's not for them.'

'My dad was all for going round and seeing Mr xxxx about his son bullying my sister but I knew that would make it worse - he would just get angry and then it would all come back on me.'

'We have a peer mentoring scheme in school which works well - it is easier to talk with them than a teacher.'

'I talked to my uncle and he said "Why not stand up for yourself - you are too easily scared?" - and I immediately felt much worse.'

'There was a group who started not wanting to talk to me just because I was not interested in football, then it became nastier.'

'I saw something my brother put up on [a social networking site] which was bang out of order - and I told him so.'

'Someone at the club started to talk to us about bullying on the web - but he's an adult and hasn't been there - he doesn't know what it's like getting a horrible message about you put on the internet for all to see.'