

Bullying Situations

Suggestions for Parents

It is very important that parents do not show how upset they may be when children confide in them that they are being bullied. This is because often, in an effort to protect their parents from hurt, children decide not to confide in them, or having done so and seen the results then go on to say that everything is O.K. when it is not.

If They Call You Names – *“If they tease you or slag you off, try and laugh it off. Don’t let them see that they have hurt you”. “Bullies like to get a reaction, if they don’t get one there is no point in them bullying you.”* Giving advice to children about how to act in the face of unkind or aggressive behaviour is often very difficult. In the case of verbal abuse or slagging - advising them to act as confidently as they can and suggesting that they tell the perpetrator clearly to stop may produce the desired effect. If the perpetrator is someone who in other circumstances was their friend, asking a question may cause the perpetrator to stand back and consider their behaviour. (eg. *“Why did you say “that” – when we were on holidays you never spoke like that. I thought we had more fun then.”*) Try and be calm and not to show upset and move away from them.

It is important to tell children Not to Hit Out - If someone is bullying you, don’t try to hit/kick them. You may get badly hurt in a fight and even if you don’t, the bully can sometimes use the fact that you hit them against you and make it seem like you are the person who is bullying. ***Bullying is not a fight or disagreement among equals but is a behaviour where someone, for whatever reason, in whatever way, feels they have a superior strength.***

Remember, It’s important to let your child know that “It’s Not About You” - Often people who bully other people do it to make themselves feel better, because they are unhappy at school or at home. Remember that they have the problem not the individual being targeted. While acknowledging the hurt, try to impress on your child that he/she should not believe what is being said to them, and also that he/she is not to blame. **It’s also important again to impress on your child that if someone has a problem it is not O.K. to make someone else suffer.** Bullying is never O.K. – there are always other ways of behaving when things are not as we would like them to be.

Encourage your child to tell friends/people they can trust in class – not in an attempt to set up cliques but rather to provide themselves with a protecting group around them. Bullying thrives when the person being targeted looks isolated or alone. Encourage your child to confide in friends about what is going on and how s/he feels. If your child is afraid to go alone (or even if not) encourage him/her to ask friends to come to tell a teacher. Sometimes, someone standing beside a person being targeted is enough to make the person who is bullying feel uncomfortable. Parents of the child who feels he/she has no friends need to find ways of supporting their child to develop friendships. Express concerns to the tutor or year head in school or have a word with a sympathetic teacher (someone the child gets on with). School needs to know in order to act to improve the situation.

It is also of the utmost importance that a bullied child is helped to see that what is occurring is a series of unpleasant incidents. A child may come to feel that **“everyone** is being mean to me **all the time”**. While it is not the case, thinking like this may bring a child to a feeling that no one likes her/him and this feeling of isolation may lead to negative behaviour, for example: self harm, skipping school or school refusal. Help your child to see that stating what happened is not telling tales.

Keeping a diary may help to keep the focus if the bullying continues. For example:

Date: 10 September ‘08

Who did what? Today, Mary/Mike said/did . . .

Where did it happen? “ . . . while we were in the yard.”

The child’s parents might also encourage him/her to keep a diary/scrapbook of **“things that made me smile”**. (Very important to emphasise the good things that are going on which may be more and more difficult to see). The idea of these diaries is to note the incidents but also to keep up morale.

The diary of negative experiences may be needed when the parents decide to act. At this stage it is an accurate and un-exaggerated account of the details of what their child has been experiencing. Since parents of children on either side of the experience may be friends they may feel uncomfortable confronting the issue with the parents of the other child. This is still a good place to start. It’s important to stress that it is the other child’s behaviour that’s at issue. With support and encouragement behaviour can be changed. Parents may prefer, however, to take the matter up with the school and here too the diary is helpful as it is a statement of events with details of each one.