

# Preventing Bullying

A guide for parents



Dear Parents,

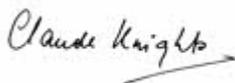
The stories told by young people we work with are harrowing, and their parents, too, have upsetting stories to relate. When a child is being bullied and no one seems to take effective action, it is frustrating and heartbreaking. And if it's your child who has been bullying others, you may be at your wits' end, worried about those being harmed, as well as your child's behaviour.

We have put together this brief guide to give you suggestions for helping your child. You can learn the signs of bullying, how to work with the school, and some practical and tested techniques to teach every child.

Please look on our website for more information. You can ring our Helpline if you need advice, and investigate our ZAP courses for bullied children, especially if you are worried about the effects bullying has had on your child. We can also help you if your child is bullying others.

Be bold and brave in your fight for what you know is right for your child.

Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Claude Knights". The signature is written in a cursive style and is underlined with a single horizontal stroke.

Claude Knights  
Director  
[www.kidscape.org.uk](http://www.kidscape.org.uk)

Note: We use the term 'targets' for those children being bullied, and 'bullies' for those children who are bullying others. We do not believe that children should be labelled or that they should think of themselves as victims - which sounds passive - but as the targets of bullies.



## WHAT IS BULLYING?

Bullying is not always easy to define. We define it as:

- deliberate hostility and aggression
- directed at a target who may appear vulnerable
- an outcome which is painful and distressing to the target

Bullying can be:

- **Physical:** pushing, kicking, hitting, pinching, and any other forms of violence, threats (“give me your dinner money or you’ll be sorry”)
- **Verbal:** name-calling, sarcasm, spreading rumours
- **Emotional:** exclusion, isolation, tormenting (hiding books, threatening gestures), ridicule, humiliation
- **Racist:** racial taunts, graffiti, gestures
- **Sexual:** unwanted physical contact, verbal abuse
- **Homophobic:** physical or verbal abuse based on stereotyping sexual orientation, whether or not the target is gay
- **Cyber bullying:** using technology to bully-text, setting up abusive websites, posting photos, misusing social networking sites, sexting

Bullies can employ many types of bullying - they choose whatever works.

## POSSIBLE RESULTS OF BULLYING

We know persistent bullying can result in:

- depression
- low self esteem that may last a lifetime
- shyness
- poor academic achievement
- isolation
- threatened or attempted suicide or self-harm

Bullying also damages bullies, who learn that they can get away with violence, and that aggression and threats can be an effective way to control people.

Kidscape carried out a survey of young offenders and found that many had been actively involved in bullying at school. Studies have found that adults who were bullies as children have a higher chance than others of acquiring a criminal record, tend to be aggressive, and have problems in maintaining relationships.

*“Sticks and stones may break your bones but words can never hurt you ”*



## MYTHS ABOUT BULLYING

Friends and relatives may say some of the following things about bullying. They are well-meaning, but wrong!

***“They’ll just have to learn to stand up to the bullies.”*** Children who tell about bullying have usually reached the end of their tether. If they could have dealt with the bullying, they would have. Asking for support is not weakness but an intelligent decision.

***“Tell them to hit back - harder.”*** Bullies are often bigger than their victims, so the victim could get seriously hurt by ‘hitting back’. Parents tell us that when their children do hit back, they are often caught by a teacher and blamed unfairly.

***“It’s character-building.”*** The sort of ‘character’ it builds is not the sort of character most parents want for their children. Bullying damages self esteem and certainly does not help either bullies or victims.

***“Sticks and stones may break your bones but words can never hurt you.”*** Bruises left by blows fade, but the scars left by name-calling can last for ever. An 84 year old man told us: *“I can remember every word those fiends said. I’ve been hearing their bullying jeers in my head all my life”.*

**Bullying is NEVER a good thing; it is always damaging, both for bullies and their targets.**

## WHY ARE SOME CHILDREN TARGETED?

Children become targets because bullies *need* victims. Our research shows bullies tend to ‘test’ their targets-to find a child who reacts by crying or running away or otherwise seems vulnerable. Bullies will find something to focus on, small or large: wearing glasses, red hair, being intelligent and getting good marks as well as struggling academically. Whatever it is, this so-called difference is just the excuse the bully needs or creates to ‘justify’ his or her behaviour.

**Bullying is not the fault of targets.** The bullies are responsible. However, we should recognise that some children may be particularly vulnerable to bullying because they may have specific difficulties, such as poor co-ordination or more serious needs. Usually school staff members are aware that these children may require extra help. One way forward is to prepare all the children by discussing such issues from the outset, thus avoiding problems.

Truancy?  
Unreasonable?

Ill?  
Bruises?  
Distressed?

## SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

- If your child has some special educational needs, he or she may be bullied because other children don't understand why a child might look or behave differently. Sometimes the bullying can be worse if a child's special needs are not immediately apparent. It helps to talk to your child's teacher about educating the other pupils.
- There is usually a support group which can help with information - you can share this with the teacher.
- Suggest that a member of the support group comes to talk to the class.
- Children can learn to help their peers, which is good for both.

## POSSIBLE SIGNS OF BULLYING

Children may indicate by their behaviour that they are being bullied. If your child shows some of the following signs, ask if someone is bullying or threatening them.

Children may:

- be frightened of walking to or from school
- not want to go on the school bus
- be unwilling to go to school (or be school phobic)

- feel ill in the mornings
- truant
- suddenly do poorly in their school work
- be anxious about using their computers or mobile phones
- come home often with clothes or books destroyed
- come home hungry (bully has taken dinner money)
- be withdrawn, distressed, stop eating, lack confidence
- attempt or threaten suicide
- cry themselves to sleep; have nightmares
- have their possessions 'go missing'
- ask for money or start stealing money (to pay the bully)
- refuse to say what's wrong (too frightened of the bully)
- have unexplained bruises, scratches, cuts
- begin to bully other children or siblings
- become aggressive and unreasonable
- give improbable excuses to explain any of the above



## HOW YOU CAN HELP YOUR CHILD

If you are worried that your child is being bullied, ask him or her directly. Children who are being bullied are often frightened to tell about what is happening, either because they have been threatened, or because they fear adult interference will make things worse. Be prepared for your child to deny that there is anything wrong. Encourage your child by saying that you are concerned and that you want to help and support him or her, whatever the problem, and that you can work together to solve this problem. Don't promise to keep the bullying secret, but reassure your child that you will help sort out the situation.

Take whatever your child says seriously and find out exactly what has been going on. This will certainly require talking to the teachers, perhaps the head of year, even the head of school. Visit our website for more advice. ([www.kidscape.org.uk](http://www.kidscape.org.uk))

Some children may need more practice in talking or playing with other children; not all master this before entering school, and an inability to blend in can set up a child for bullying. 'Bully-proof' your child by emphasising a positive outlook, a good stance and eye contact, a smile, taking turns, sharing. Help develop their social skills by role-playing with them.

## SUPPORTING A BULLIED CHILD

Bullying has been compared to brainwashing, with the targets ending up believing that somehow they deserve to be bullied. They feel vulnerable and powerless. Their self-esteem may have been considerably damaged, especially if the bullying has been going on for some time, and rebuilding a child's self-confidence takes plenty of praise and affection.

- Reassure your child often by emphasising your love and that you are 100% on his or her side
- Reassure children that the bullying is not their fault, and can be stopped
- Explain that reacting to bullies by becoming upset only encourages them. If bullies get no response, they'll get bored. We know staying calm isn't easy!
- Practise saying "No" very firmly and walking away from a bully. It is hard for the bully to go on bullying if the target appears not to be upset. Other techniques that work can be found in the 'Saying No' section later.
- Help your child think up simple, neutral responses to the bully's most frequent taunts. Responses don't have to be brilliantly witty or funny, but children on our ZAP assertiveness training courses say that it helps to have a reply prepared
- Try to minimise opportunities for bullying: tell your child, don't take valuable possessions to school, don't be the last person in the

changing room. Stay with a group even if they are not friends - there's safety in numbers

- If the bully threatens your child to get money or possessions and there is no safe way out of the situation, tell your child to give up whatever it is the bully wants. Keeping safe is more important than keeping possessions
- Make time to sit down and talk - about your child's ideas, feelings, solutions
- Make opportunities for your child to do well; for example, plan activities your child is interested in and good at
- Give them responsibilities - this helps to make a child feel valued and important
- They can make a 'feel good' poster: find a happy photograph of your child and stick it in the centre of a piece of paper. Around it, work together to write down some of the nice things people have said about your child
- Sometimes bullied children become withdrawn - help them develop social skills: invite others round and arrange outings
- Try not to let your child sit around moping - diversions can help. Encourage work on a hobby or a sport
- Sign up for Scouts, Guides or martial arts, drama, music and other courses outside of school to increase the possibility of making new friends
- Don't discuss your own distress and anger in front of your child. Your calm will help them stay calm. And many children fear upsetting their families.



*What am I good at?*



## WHY DO SOME CHILDREN BULLY OTHERS?

There are lots of different reasons why a child may become a bully. Some children may turn to bullying as a way of coping with a difficult situation: the death of a relative, their parents' divorce. Some are used to bullying to get their own way, often in a family where everyone bullies; some are abused and take out their humiliation and anger on others; some want to be 'top dog' and are prepared to use aggression and violence to command obedience and loyalty.

Whatever the causes of the bullying, bullies pick on others as a way of making life better for themselves. They use intimidation to get what they want. They are often not happy and use bullying as a way of trying to achieve popularity and friends. True, bullies often have a gang, but many of their followers are frightened of being targeted too. They are frightened people, not friends.

Bullies have to learn that bullying is unacceptable and that, if they continue to behave unacceptably, then there are consequences. Although they should be given plenty of encouragement and help to change, bullies must not be allowed to get away with tormenting others.

## WHAT TO DO IF YOUR CHILD IS THE BULLY

If you learn that your child is a bully:

- Stay calm
- Try not to become angry and defensive
- Ask exactly what your child has been doing
- Ask if there is a pattern to this behaviour, or is this a one-off incident
- Talk to teachers, playground supervisors, and other parents - the more you can find out about what has been going on, the easier it will be to work out why your child has been bullying and what can be done about it.
- Enlist the school's support in helping your child learn better habits



## HELPING THE CHILD WHO BULLIES

- See if your child has any ideas about why the bullying started, and what might help it end. Is there something else in the background? Has the child been bullied as well? The majority of bullies have been bullied!
- Reassure a child that you still love him or her - it's the behaviour you don't like, but you will work with your child to help change this
- Find out if there is something in particular which is troubling the child
- Work out a way for your child to make amends for the bullying, starting with an apology.
- Set limits. Stop any show of aggression immediately and help the child find other, non-aggressive ways of reacting
- If your child bullies when faced with certain situations, work together to practise alternative ways of behaving
- Explain that it is not a weakness to get away from a situation where the child can feel himself losing his temper. It is a sensible way of ensuring that the situation doesn't get worse
- Teach your child the difference between assertive behaviour and aggressive behaviour - use the Assertiveness Section in this booklet
- Create opportunities to praise your child for doing things well
- Talk to the school staff. Explain that your child is making an effort to change his or her behaviour. Ask them for ideas. It might be

helpful for you and your child to talk to a psychologist. Ask your GP for a referral

- Talk to the staff about setting realistic goals for your child - don't expect too much too soon - and about rewarding him or her when a goal is achieved. Ask if the school can provide a room where children could go if they feel they need time to 'cool off'
- Other children may deliberately provoke your child, especially if they think he or she is trying to reform. Explain to your child that there may be taunts or provocations, but that it is best not to respond, but just walk away

Parents can help by controlling their own aggression and by making it clear that violence is always unacceptable.



## **APPROACHING THE SCHOOL IF A CHILD IS BULLIED**

When talking to school staff about your child's experiences of being bullied, try not to be aggressive, or lose your temper. A good working relationship between you and the school is crucial.

Keep and bring along a diary of incidents, including copies of online bullying. Make a note of all injuries, with photographs and details of doctor/hospital visits. A written record makes it easier to check facts. Keep a note of everyone you speak to about the bullying; follow up every meeting with written correspondence and keep copies.



## STEPS TO BE TAKEN

**Assault/Theft:** If your child has been attacked or has had property stolen, you can report this to the police if you feel it appropriate.

**Form Teacher / Head of Year:** Request a meeting, and take notes. Make a follow-up appointment for a week later to discuss the results of the investigation and whether action taken by the school has been successful. Follow-up in writing and keep copies

**Head Teacher:** If your child is still being bullied, make an appointment to see the Head Teacher. Make a short list of points you want answered - use this as a reminder in the meeting. Ask to see the anti-bullying policy. You can take a relative or friend with you. Take notes, follow up in writing and keep copies.

**Board of Governors:** If the bullying continues, contact the Board of Governors and ask for a formal complaint form. The name and address of the Chairperson of the Board of Governors is available from the school

**Local Authority:** If the Governors don't help, you can complain in writing to the local Director of Education. Your Town or County Hall can give you the name. Your letter should begin, "I am writing to make a formal complaint..."

If you wish to complain to the Secretary of State for Education you can do so, by writing to him or her at: Sanctuary Buildings, Great Smith Street, London SW1P 3BT. Your letter should begin, "I am writing to complain because I believe that the school is acting unreasonably..."

**Town or County Councillor/MP:** You can also contact your Town or County Councillor at the Town or County Hall. Make an appointment to see them at their 'surgery' and enlist their help.

**Another School/Home Education:** If you make no headway and the bullying continues, you might consider sending your child to another school. You can also arrange for your child to be educated at home; this is a big decision. See the Organisations List for groups that will help you fulfil the legal requirements.

## ...it's **NOT** the target's fault

### **DON'T BE PUT OFF....**

Don't be put off if the school does not respond at first. Sometimes staff can be reluctant to acknowledge that bullying is taking place, perhaps through lack of knowledge of what to do about it. It seems easier to pretend nothing is happening. Staff may also try to blame the target for the bullying. This is wrong. Bullying is not the target's fault. It is a school discipline problem, and it is up to the school to sort it out. Don't be fobbed off with excuses and vague promises of 'something will be done'. Insist on action and make it clear that you will not be satisfied until you are sure that your child is no longer bullied.

### **YOUR RIGHTS, YOUR CHILD'S RIGHTS**

Schools are charged with a duty of care towards their pupils - they are said to be *in loco parentis*. Schools also have a duty to provide an adequate and effective education. Your child's education is being disrupted by the bullying, so you have the right to say that you believe that the school is failing in its 'duty of care'.

You have the right to complain to the Governing Body. All Governing Bodies have a parent representative. You can contact the Parent Governor or the Chairman. The Governing Body is legally bound to hear your complaint and treat it reasonably and within the law.

You do not have to send your child to school. According to the law, parents have a legal duty to see that their child receives "efficient full-time education suitable to his age, ability, and aptitude .... either by regular attendance at school or otherwise". This means that you can educate your child at home if necessary.

If the bullying is very bad and your child is extremely distressed, your doctor may decide that spending some time away from school will help him or her.



## WHAT CAN THE SCHOOL DO ABOUT BULLYING?

All schools are required to have an anti-bullying policy, which is available to parents, and should deal with any incident in accordance with the procedures set out in the policy. These anti-bullying guidelines should be familiar to every person in the school, and pupils should understand what will happen if they persist with bullying.

The school should be prepared to:

- take the problem seriously
  - investigate the incident
  - interview bullies and targeted children **separately**
  - interview any witnesses
  - decide on appropriate action, such as:
    - obtain an apology from bully/bullies to those targeted
    - impose sanctions against bully/bullies
    - inform bully's/bullies' parents
    - insist on return of items 'borrowed' or stolen
  - hold lessons/class discussions/assemblies about bullying
  - provide a safe haven during school hours for target
  - provide support teacher for targeted child
  - encourage bully to change his/her behaviour
  - hold a follow-up meeting with target's family to report progress
- inform all members of staff about incident and action taken
  - keep a written record of incident, interviews and action taken



## BULLYING OUTSIDE SCHOOL

Sometimes the bullying starts in school but then spills over into evenings and weekends.

Sometimes it may begin independently of any school and take place only when the victim is at home or playing nearby. This type of bullying can be very hard to deal with, especially if the bullies' parents won't intervene to stop their children tormenting others. Verbal threats, taunts and harassment are within the scope of the law, although they are more difficult to prove.

The list below gives some suggestions for dealing with bullying outside school:

- Keep a written record of all incidents and of all the people you talk to about the situation - this makes it easier to check facts
- Try to find out who is doing the bullying
- If incidents are caused by children from another school, contact that school and work together
- Try having a quiet word with the bullies' parents, if it is safe
- If the bullies are neighbours and don't respond to complaints, inform the Council/Tenants/Residents Association/Neighbourhood Watch
- Visit the Citizens Advice Bureau and discuss the problem
- Look for local self-assertiveness courses for your child. Use the Assertiveness Notes in this leaflet
- Enrol your child in self-defence or martial arts classes to increase their confidence
- Talk to local youth leaders who may know all the children involved
- Enrol your children in activities which do not involve the bullies: play schemes, Scouts, Brownies, Cubs, St John's Ambulance/Red Cross or youth groups
- Seek advice from local religious leaders
- Inform the police and ask if they can help. They may decide to caution the bullies. If the officer you speak to is unhelpful, ask to talk to the Officer in Charge
- Talk to any witnesses of the bullying and/or attack - would they be prepared to back you up?
- If possible and you are not in danger, video, photograph or record incidents.
- All physical assaults should be reported to the police
- Photograph all injuries (hold a ruler against bruises to show their size) and keep a record of all medical treatment
- There are several types of assault charge which depend on how seriously the victim is hurt, should you decide to press charges
- If your child is experiencing cyber bullying (via mobile phone, website or social media sites) then look at Kidscape's website [www.kidscape.org.uk](http://www.kidscape.org.uk) for detailed information and advice about the steps you can take

ASSERTIVE



PASSIVE

AGGRESSIVE

## ASSERTIVENESS FOR VICTIMS AND BULLIES

Read this section through with your child. Role-play difficult situations with them so that they can practise some of these techniques.

If you are a victim of bullying or if you bully other people, practising some basic assertiveness skills can help you feel better about yourself.

Assertiveness training can also teach you different ways of responding to upsetting situations.

There are three response styles:

- passive
- aggressive
- assertive

**Passive** people behave as if other people's rights matter more than theirs

**Aggressive** people behave as if their rights matter more than those of others'

**Assertive** people respect themselves and others equally.

In general, targets tend to be passive and bullies tend to be aggressive.

This section is about how you can change your behaviour from passive or aggressive to become assertive.

# No!

## MAKING REQUESTS

- Be clear about what you want
- Plan ahead and practise
- **Make your request short and precise** (“That is my pencil and I want it back”)
- **Decide what you want to say and stick to it** (“I would like my pencil back”).

## SAYING NO

- When you say NO, say it firmly.
- **Listen to your body and to your feelings:** what do you really want to say?
- **Try not to get caught up in arguments** and don't get angry or upset if you don't get your own way.
- **If you don't want to do something, don't give in to pressure.** Be firm. Remember, we have the right to say NO.
- **If you are not sure, and somebody is pressurising you for an answer,** say “I need more time to decide” or “I need more information”.
- **Don't make excuses:** keep your body posture assertive - don't stand hunched up in victim-mode. Look the person in the eye. From the decisive way you are speaking and standing they will know you are serious. (If you find looking people in the eye difficult, practise keeping eye contact at home.)
- **Offer an alternative:** “No, I don't want to play football. Let's go for a swim.”

**When we say no to someone, we are only refusing a request. We are not rejecting the person.**



## DEALING WITH TAUNTS AND INSULTS

**Fogging:** if you respond to insults with more insults, or let them get to you, they can build up and up until they become unbearable. Try 'fogging'.

**How it works:** When other people make hurtful remarks, don't argue and try not to become upset. Imagine that you are inside a huge, white fog-bank: the insults are swallowed up by the fog long before they reach you. Nothing touches you.

Reply to taunts with something short and bland, in a calm voice: "That's what you think". "Maybe". Then walk away.

This technique might seem very strange at first and very hard to do, but it does work and can help you blot out insults - and confuse the bully. Practise at home.



## DEALING WITH ANGER

If you lose your temper or become aggressive easily, you can practise controlling these feelings. It is not necessarily wrong to get angry, but it is wrong to take out your anger on others.

**Learn to recognise the signs that you are about to 'explode'** - work out what you are going to do next time you feel that you are losing your temper.

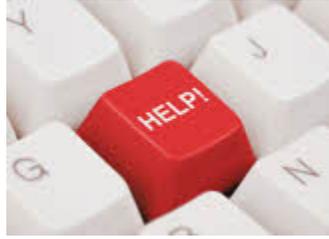
- **get away from the situation or the person who is making you angry** - this is not 'running away'. This is the best way of keeping yourself and others from getting hurt either through a fight or through arguments or name-calling.
- **take several deep breaths and count to ten**
- **exercise helps you let off steam** - go for a run or a brisk walk
- **learn simple relaxation exercises** - anger, stress, and anxiety are often related and if you can learn how to relax, it will be easier to control your temper. For example, tense every muscle in your body and then slowly relax each individual muscle, starting with your toes.

You may have to pretend a lot at first and act in a way you don't really feel. But eventually the acting will cease and you will become more assertive than you thought possible!

## KIDSCAPE AND ZAP

Kidscape, founded in 1984, is the first national charity set up to teach children and young people how to keep safe from bullying. Kidscape has a helpline for parents concerned about bullying, training for school staff and other professionals, publications and a comprehensive website. We work directly with children who have been severely bullied in our free course called ZAP - an innovative one day workshop; parents attend their own session at the same time. Thousands of children have come to ZAP and had their lives turned around, their bullying stopped or greatly reduced. Find out more on our website [www.kidscape.org.uk](http://www.kidscape.org.uk), which is full of resources for everyone.

A stylized graphic of the word 'ZAP!' in a bold, sans-serif font. The letters are red with a yellow outline and a drop shadow, giving it a 3D effect. The exclamation point is also red with a yellow outline.



## ORGANISATIONS THAT CAN HELP

**Kidscape:** Kidscape's website has useful information for young people, parents, carers and professionals [www.kidscape.org.uk](http://www.kidscape.org.uk)

**The Parents' Anti-bullying Helpline** gives advice to parents of bullied children. The helpline number is 08451 205 204 and opening hours can be found on Kidscape's website

**Youth2Youth, Kidscape's Helpline for 13-19 year olds** [www.youth2youth.co.uk](http://www.youth2youth.co.uk)

**DIAL UK** Advice about disability [www.dialuk.info](http://www.dialuk.info)

**Anti-Bullying Network** [www.antibullying.net](http://www.antibullying.net)

**Family Lives helpline** 24 hour confidential parent line - 0808 800 2222 [www.familylives.org.uk](http://www.familylives.org.uk)

**Childline** Sometimes your child may want to talk to someone not connected with the family or school. Freephone: 0800 11 11 [www.childline.org.uk](http://www.childline.org.uk)

**Anti-Bullying Alliance** Website provides information and advice for parents, children and schools on tackling bullying. [www.anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk](http://www.anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk)

**Childnet International** Information, advice and resources on the safe and responsible use of new technology. [www.childnet-int.org](http://www.childnet-int.org)

## LEGAL ADVICE

**ACE, Advisory Centre for Education** [www.ace-ed.org.uk](http://www.ace-ed.org.uk)

**Coram Children's Legal Centre** [www.childrenslegalcentre.com](http://www.childrenslegalcentre.com)

**Education Law Association (ELAS)** [www.educationlawassociation.org.uk](http://www.educationlawassociation.org.uk)

## ADVICE ON HOME EDUCATION

**Education Otherwise** [www.education-otherwise.net](http://www.education-otherwise.net)

**Home Education Advisory Service** [www.heas.org.uk](http://www.heas.org.uk)

## COUNSELLING

**Youth Access** [www.youthaccess.org.uk](http://www.youthaccess.org.uk)

**Samaritans** 24 hour helpline 08457 909090 [www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org)



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