

Guidance on Bullying

'Wise up...Back Off'

Any child can be bullied, any age, ability, background or belief. A child may be experiencing bullying in one or several ways. As parents we need to be aware that if a child's mood, attitude or behaviour has changed he/she may be being bullied. If the child says they are being bullied, take time to hear their story.

Bullying can make a child's life miserable. Every child has the right to feel safe in their environment and it is the responsibility of adults to protect them. Tell children that bullying happens in most schools and neighbourhoods and because of that, they need to know how to respond.

Firstly, whether the bully is a child or an adult, it should be made very clear that bullying is unacceptable. Secondly, the child should know that speaking up about the bullying is always the right thing to do. Thirdly the child should be given some tips about how to respond to the bully.

What is Bullying

Bullying is intentional behaviour carried out to cause distress to others. It can come from one or a group of people. It can be:

- Physical** - hitting, kicking, pushing or another form of physical attack
- Verbal** - name calling, persistent "teasing", spreading rumours or threatening
- Social** - exclusion or refusing to communicate, taking friends away
- Psychological** - chipping away at a person's self-esteem
- Cyber** - sending insulting text messages, emails and web attacks

Indicators of Bullying

As a parent you may become aware of some changes in your child's behaviour, routines or attitude that may indicate that there is a bullying issue. These could be:

Behaviour

Not wanting to go to school	Avoiding particular days or lessons
Going in late or returning late	Avoiding friends or others at school
Doing poorly at their work	Losing possessions, books, equipment, money, clothes

Physical

Mystery illnesses	Being sent home sick a lot
Marks on body	Damage to possessions or clothing

Emotional

Becoming withdrawn	Unusually aggressive or irritable
Easily startled	Changes in sleep patterns
Loss of confidence	Outbursts of unexplained tears

'Reasons' for bullying

There is never a right or acceptable reason for bullying. The bully's reason for picking on another person is not the point, because bullies will know what to say to annoy a child. Usually the reason for a child to bully is that they want to make themselves seem important, to gain attention or to satisfy an unmet need. Keeping in mind that a bully will use any excuse to carry out this behaviour, the following are some so called reasons that children/young people report having been bullied about:

<i>Weight</i>	<i>Looks</i>	<i>Family</i>	<i>Race</i>	<i>Disability</i>
<i>School Work</i>	<i>Background</i>	<i>Ability</i>	<i>Sexuality</i>	<i>Beliefs</i>

It is crucial that your family do not accept or condone any form of bullying in your home regardless of how harmless, trivial, or just fun it may seem at the time. Children model their behaviour on the examples they see at home. If they see their parents/carers being tolerant and sorting out differences in a reasonable way, they will follow that example. On the other hand, if they see their parents using bullying and aggressive tactics to get their own way, the child will act similarly with his/her friends.

What You Should Do

- First reassure your child that they did the right thing in telling you about the bullying. Calmly talk to your child about the experience and encourage them to talk about their feelings.
- Make a note of what your child says, who was involved, who witnessed it, what was done. Also record times and places, if possible.
- Explain that it needs to be reported to a member of staff.
- Contact the school and explain that you want to talk with the teacher about your concerns and bring your written records with you.
- Ask for a copy of the School's Anti Bullying Policy, the teacher is usually the first stage of a process you need to follow. The majority of schools in Northern Ireland have an Anti-Bullying Policy, and within that policy it should tell you how to report the bullying to the school.
- Ask the school what exactly they will be doing about the bullying and particularly how they will ensure it stops.
- If the bullying does not stop or you are not happy with how the matter is handled go back to the school.

Keep all of your written documentation and keep notes of conversations held with school.

Help your child to figure out the best way to respond to the bully.

- Suggest that until the bullying is stopped, he keeps with other children, and avoids being in isolated areas.
- Suggest that he role play how he might respond, encouraging him to look confident and to walk away, saying something like 'Wise up' or 'Yeah ..whatever'
- Build up their self esteem and confidence, reinforce your child's right to stand up for themselves and be left alone and have their wishes respected.

Ask you child on a regular basis, how things are going now. Keep in regular contact with the school and ask for feedback. Be prepared to stand your ground if you meet with resistance or apathy. Be a role model for your child.

What You Shouldn't Do

- It is not a good idea to 'Take the matter into your own hands' and approach the bully, no matter how angry or frustrated you may be.
- Don't encourage your child to fight back, hit or behave in any sort of bullying way. Their safety is the most important thing and attempting to hit back or behave like the bully could lead to them being hurt or accused of being a bully themselves.

If you would like to talk to someone about any of the issues above, the following organisations will be able to guide you –

Parents Advice Centre
Floor 2, Andras House
60 Great Victoria Street
Belfast BT2 7BB
Phone: 028 90 310891 Website: www.parentsadvicecentre.org

Northern Ireland Anti-Bullying Forum
15 Richmond Park
Belfast BT10 0HB
Phone: 028 90 431314 Website: www.niabf.org.uk

Childline Northern Ireland
1st Floor, Queens House
14 Queen Street
Belfast BT1 6ED
Phone: 0800 1111 Website: www.childline.org.uk

If you would like help with any other family issue, Please ring **Parents Advice Centre** for guidance and support on **Freephone 0808 8010 722** or email parents@pachelp.org