

Bullying... A guide for parents and carers



As a parent or carer, there are a number of things you can do if your child tells you they're being bullied, which can help them to feel in control again.

Dealing with Bullying Behaviour

Very often, children and young people are reluctant to tell adults that they're being bullied. This might be because they are scared of an over-reaction, they don't want to burden parents/carers if there are other things going on in the family, they're embarrassed, or they are worried that telling might make the situation worse.

But there are a number of things you can look out for if you're concerned your child is being bullied.

Potential signs

- ❖ They become withdrawn
- ❖ They have scratches and bruises that can't really be explained
- ❖ They don't want to go to school or they are having trouble with school work
- ❖ They don't want to go out or play with friends
- ❖ Their online behaviour changes
- ❖ Changes to how and when they're using their mobile.
- ❖ Changes are made in the route they take to school
- ❖ They complain of headaches, stomach aches and other pains
- ❖ They become easily upset, tearful, ill-tempered or display other out-of-character behaviour

Of course this list is by no means exhaustive, and displaying some of the above symptoms won't necessarily mean that your child is being bullied. But as a parent or carer, you will know better than anyone if there's an unexplained change in your child's behaviour that needs to be explored.

So what should we do?

We know that bullying takes something away from people; that is one of the things that makes it different from other behaviours. It takes away a person's ability to feel in control and take effective action. When you respond to bullying behaviour your focus has to be on helping them to get back that feeling of being in control and being themselves again. That's why we have to involve young people – to find out what they want to happen, what they would like to happen, and what they are worried about happening. And sometimes we need to take a lead from them as to what pace we go at. If we can do that, we can help restore that feeling of being in control; this is something children and young people tell us they value when they have been bullied. They can feel powerless so being asked and involved in what to do next can help address this.

Listening

Children and young people appreciate adults who take the time to listen. When it comes to bullying behaviour, our capacity to listen can help us to understand young people, how they are being affected and what we can do to help. This means much more than simply 'hearing' the words. To really understand children and young people we need to pay attention to all of the key elements of their communication. Listen carefully to what they're saying but also how they're saying it, and pay attention to their body language and facial expressions – you can often learn a lot from these alone.



All behaviour communicates how we feel

'Active' listening is also about responding appropriately to what your child is communicating. For example, they might be reluctant to verbally tell you that they are being bullied but might display subtle cues, such as becoming withdrawn. Noticing this change and taking time to ask your child how they are can help. Your response will make it easier for them to tell you about the bullying and gain your support.

Things to remember

Don't Panic! Remaining calm supports good listening and is reassuring for your child.

Give your full attention. This is reassuring and shows you are taking them seriously. Explain the reasons for your concern. Feeding back sensitively what you have noticed can help your child to see more clearly how bullying is impacting on them.

Talk to them about where they go online. Establish a clear understanding of the sites they use and how they access them.

What do they want you to do? Exploring this will make your child feel valued and will help you to understand what support they need.

Keep Listening! If they are reluctant to talk straight away, remind them that you are always available to listen and they can talk to you at any time.



Exploring options together

Hearing that your child is being bullied evokes an understandably emotional response. It's difficult for parents and carers to hear, and sometimes the advice we give children and young people at this time isn't necessarily the best advice.

There is never one, single, answer when it comes to bullying, it's about knowing how to think about it and how to approach it. Sometimes you have to ask your child, 'What do you want to happen?' 'Tell me what you have done so far?' 'What would you like me to do?' 'What do you think would happen if, say, I was to go up to the school and talk to them about it?' Listen to what they say.

If they are worried that you would make it worse, you might have to try something else because most children want bullying to stop with the minimum of fuss. You could try, 'What do you think would happen if I spoke to someone's mum?' or 'Is there someone else you can talk to?' It's about exploring options; thinking about what you can do and sometimes having to say, as a parent, 'look if I'm worried and I don't think you're safe, I'm going to step in', and explain why you are doing it.

Helping young people cope

Help your child to suggest some realistic options that they can try to address the behaviour, and support them to do so. Some children might be good at writing things down or recording their feelings in a blog, others might be able to react to bullying behaviour by using a clever comeback, while some will feel better just for having told someone.

Children and young people need to know that they can talk to someone. They might not want to worry you as a parent or carer, or see you over react, but they need to know they can talk to someone; it might be an older brother, a cousin, an aunt or a teacher or they can call Childline and speak to someone they don't know in confidence. Just talking about it can help, and can reduce worry and stress levels.

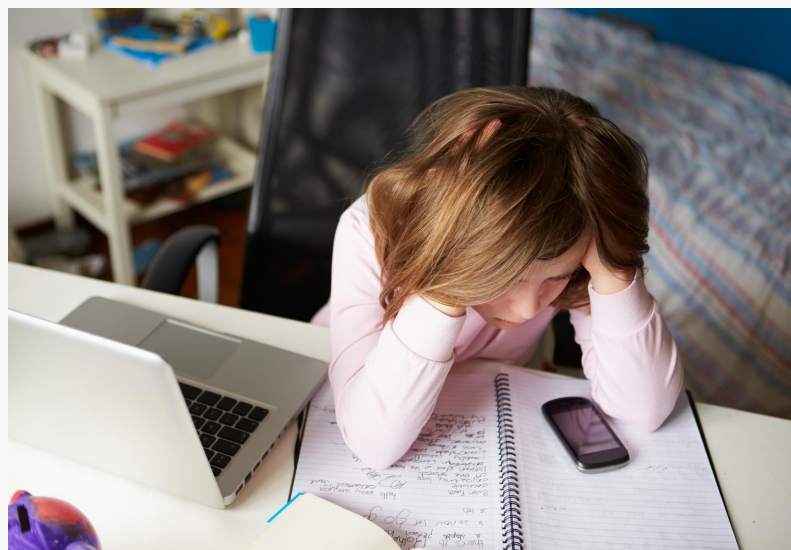


Remember, what works for one person won't always work for another, what worked before might not work today – it is all about exploring options. What will

help a child cope with what is happening, as well as what will make the behaviour stop. We need to be alert to both.

The temptation to run off and solve the situation is an understandable one, but we should always take a moment, pause and think, 'how do I give my child back a sense of being in control?', because it's that sense of being in control that has been taken from them, and that has to focus how you respond.

It is also worth remembering that a child may feel bullied even if they haven't been. For example, they might not have been invited to a party because the



numbers were limited or they misjudged the way a person looked at them. We still need to respond to how they feel but there may be no need to label the other person or feel that something needs to be done about them.

Also a child can attempt to bully someone, without any success.

For example, they may shout homophobic slurs at someone who is not in the least bit bothered. This child has not been bullied but the behaviour they are experiencing is unacceptable and needs to be addressed.

Sharing your concerns about bullying

Approaching a school or other organisation about a bullying incident can be daunting – but remember it's in their best interests to help you resolve the situation and reach a satisfactory outcome.

Make an appointment to speak to the Head Teacher, senior youth worker or other adult that your child feels comfortable with. Calmly tell them what has been going on – it would be helpful if you have details of when the incidents have taken place – then discuss what you would like to happen next and how you can proceed together. The school or organisation should not suggest that the bullying is your child's fault, or that they should change their behaviour, move to another class or even move to another school as a solution to the

bullying. Neither should they say that because it happened online, it is not their responsibility. Bullying happens 'to' a person first and foremost.

People who are bullied take the impact of that with them, wherever they are. If they inform someone at school, at the youth group or anywhere else that something's happened and they're worried or scared, the adults must respond in a supportive way. Children and young people tend to open up to the people they believe can/will help them.

Don't expect the situation to be fully resolved at the first meeting, that won't always be possible. Neither should you expect the person(s) involved to be automatically excluded. Exclusion alone will rarely change bullying behaviour. Schools and other organisations often employ a variety of methods to prevent and tackle bullying; some will have an immediate effect, others may take longer. They will also need time to investigate the incidents, so agree a plan of



action and set a date to meet again to review the situation. Keep in touch with them and be a 'pushy parent' if you need to be, but try to keep the relationship on a positive basis, this will be more beneficial to all parties in the long run.

If the bullying is happening in the community and you need to talk to a neighbour or another parent, do so tactfully and carefully. Again, it's important to keep the channels of communication open – and remember your child will probably want the situation resolved with the minimum of fuss.

I am going to sound hugely biased, but then again I have spent the last 20 years training in Martial Arts and have been running my school in Newport Pagnell for over 5 years; designing programmes that challenge children to become more than they are now. A sport where they make better quality friends. A place where they feel not just part of a team, but a community of like-minded people who are all there to help each other succeed; one that helps your child to become all that they are meant to be and more.

Kicks Taekwon-Do Academy has been doing all of this and more since 2015. We are well known in our community for not just teaching children to look after themselves when you aren't around, we also teach them valuable life skills that will form the basis of their success well into their adult years. Imagine your son or daughter having the self discipline to make the right decisions, having the understanding of what commitment is, having the ability to not only set but to achieve goals and all whilst making a better social circle of friends. Best image of all is having one where you know your child has the ability to cope not only physically with today's challenges, but having the ability to cope emotionally and all with a positive mindset too.

We have age specific curriculums that will develop the characteristics of your child, physically, emotionally, intellectually and socially. They are also split down in to 4 different levels so they will not only be working with people their own age, but also their own ability level.

As a way of saying 'thank you' to you for taking the time to read this, I would like to extend to your family a free weeks training pass so you can see the amazing difference we can make to your family. That will give you chance to "test drive" what we do here at our amazing Academy.

For your free weeks pass, please call us now on 07739 321585 so we can arrange a convenient time for you to be welcomed into our school.

But hurry, our beginners classes never have spaces for long!

Many thanks.

Chris Clarke—Chief Instructor.