

- And of course, the people who bully differ as well. They may be from the same school or they may be neighbours. They may be the same age as your child or much older – they may even be adults. They may even be brothers and sisters.

On top of this, there are various schools of thought about how you should deal with bullying. Because of this, dealing with bullying is far from easy and it's often difficult just to know where to begin and where to go for help.

But the good news is, there are a number of general things you can do to help your child right away - and this booklet has been designed to provide some very basic and immediate answers to the most commonly asked, general questions about bullying.

The booklet will probably work best if you are a parent or carer of a 4-11 year-old child who is being bullied, but you might still find it useful if your child is younger or older, if you are a teacher, a family member or a good friend of someone who is being bullied.

You can simply flick through to whichever questions and answers you need at the moment.

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What can be called bullying?

Believe it or not, although we use the term bullying very often, it's very hard to define. Even leading researchers have a job to pin it down, so you are not alone if you're struggling to work out what can be called bullying and what can't.

Bullying can be done by one or more people and what marks it as bullying is that it is deliberate, although proving that can sometimes be difficult if someone says they were only teasing and didn't realise it was causing so much distress. Bullying usually happens more than once and can be physical, psychological and/or social. It causes distress for the person being bullied and the target of the bullying is usually weaker in some way and feels unable to defend themselves when it is happening.

Bullying can include:

- Name calling, teasing, making fun of, humiliating and taunting a child
- Excluding a child and not speaking to them
- Spreading rumours about a child
- Shouting nasty and offensive things
- Spitting at a child
- Invading a child's personal space
- Taking/hiding their belongings
- Sending unpleasant messages via text and email
- Tripping a child up as they walk past
- Pushing and shoving
- Threatening a child verbally or physically
- Forcing them to give money, possessions or do something against their will

Why does a child bully?

Children who bully do so for any number of reasons.

- Sometimes a child will insist that they didn't realise their behaviour was causing so much distress.

To what extent can a school be expected to help?

Schools are required by law to have a policy on how to deal with bullying and you can ask to see a copy of this so that you know what that particular school has documented that they will do if bullying happens in their school.

However, the school must be informed that bullying is taking place and recognise it as such to put this policy into practice. You must provide them with as much evidence as possible. The 'What do I need to find out from my child about the bullying' section might be a good place to start.

Most schools will respond brilliantly if you approach them about it; some might find it harder to accept.

Schools are not, however, directly responsible for bullying which happens outside the school grounds. They should take an interest though, as the bullying can continue in school.

What is the best way to approach a school?

If this is the first time you are approaching school, you have a good relationship with the class teacher and you think the bullying isn't severe, then:

- Try approaching your child's class teacher first and give her the opportunity to sort it out.
- Teachers may prefer you to agree a time when you can both talk properly rather than in the middle of a hurried, chaotic home time.
- Don't assume teachers already know about the bullying – they might not. This might be the first time they've heard about it.
- They may also have been told a completely different version to the one you've been told – so try to stay as calm as possible until you can both piece together all the facts.



- When you're talking about the bullying, stick to the facts (see the section, 'What do I need to know about the bullying so that I can help my child' for suggestions). This can be easier said than done.
- Ask the teacher what they suggest you both do.
- If you want to, you can agree to have a quick catch up at a certain time to check that whatever has been suggested is working.
- If your child knows that you have been to see their class teacher about it, then you'll need to reassure them and tell them what you and the teacher are going to try.

What if your contact with the school isn't helping to resolve the problem?

If talking to your child's class teacher doesn't seem to be working, then you can make an appointment to see the Head Teacher.

Before you meet, if you haven't already, you can ask/phone the school secretary for a copy of the school's bullying policy. Make sure you get this before the meeting and give yourself time to read it. It might be available through the school's website.

Once you have the policy, you can take a look at what it says the school will do about bullying. Then you can be clear about what should be happening and what the school is obliged to do.

You may not feel confident talking to the headteacher about this matter so if it makes you feel better, take someone with you – your partner or your mum for example.

Sometimes anger might have built up before the meeting. Don't allow yourself to go to the meeting in this state as this will cause defensiveness and there is a danger that you might end up not concentrating together on the bullying and what to do about it.