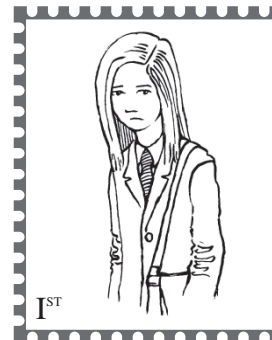


# The emotional cost of bullying

## Factsheet for parents and teachers

### About this factsheet

This is one in a series of factsheets for parents, teachers and young people entitled *Mental Health and Growing Up*. The aims of these factsheets are to provide practical, up-to-date information about mental health problems (emotional, behavioural and psychiatric disorders) that can affect children and young people. This factsheet looks in detail at what bullying is and how it can affect young people. It also gives advice for parents and teachers about how they can help a young person who is being bullied.



## Introduction

### What is bullying?

Bullying happens when a child is picked on by another child or group of children. It is hurtful and deliberate. It can happen in many different ways. Children who bully may:

- hit or punch another child
- kick them or trip them up;
- take or spoil their things;
- call them names;
- tease them;
- give them nasty looks;
- threaten them;
- make racist remarks about them;
- spread nasty rumours or stories about them;
- not let them join in play or games;
- not talk to them – send them to Coventry.

Victims find it difficult to defend themselves. Bullying usually happens again and again, and can go on for a long time unless something is done about it.

### How common is bullying?

Bullying is very common and probably happens in all schools. Recent surveys in this country have shown that one in four primary school pupils and one in 10 secondary school pupils are being bullied.

### Why does it happen?

There is no single reason why some children become bullies or victims. Children who are aggressive are more likely to become bullies. Often they have seen, or been a victim of, violence at home. They pick on children who appear different in some way – those who are quiet, shy, alone at playtime, and unable to defend themselves. Children who stammer, who

have a disability or who have special educational needs are also more likely to be bullied.

Schools vary in how much bullying there is and how they deal with it. All schools should have a clear policy on bullying. They make sure that all teachers, parents, and children know about it. They make it clear that they won't allow bullying or aggressive behaviour. Schools that have these policies, and who take every incident of bullying seriously, tend to have less bullying.

### What effects does bullying have?

Being bullied can seriously affect a child's physical and mental health. They lack confidence, feel bad about themselves, have few friends and spend playtime alone. They may find it hard to face going to school and difficult to concentrate on their work. They may complain of various physical symptoms as a result of their upset. They may worry and try to avoid going to school. Others become very anxious, find it hard to sleep and may feel depressed, or even suicidal. These problems can carry on long after the bullying has stopped.

### Who and what can help?

#### Parents

**Be open to the possibility** that your child might be being bullied. Some parents may not think of bullying as a possible reason for their child's distress.

**Listen** One of the most important things you can do is to listen to your child if they say they are being bullied. It can be very difficult for them to talk to anyone about it.

**Take your child seriously** Many children suffer in silence for a long time before they tell anyone.

## Sources of further information

- ChildLine provides a free and confidential telephone service for children: Helpline 0800 1111; [www.childline.org.uk](http://www.childline.org.uk).
- Department for Education and Skills produces information on bullying. [www.deni.gov.uk](http://www.deni.gov.uk).
- Kidscape provide advice, run training courses and produce helpful booklets and information about bullying. 2 Grosvenor Gardens, London SW1W 0DH; tel. 020 7730 3300; [www.kidscape.org.uk](http://www.kidscape.org.uk).

### Or you may want to look at these websites:

[www.antibully.org.uk](http://www.antibully.org.uk)  
[www.bullying.co.uk](http://www.bullying.co.uk)  
[www.scotland.gov.uk](http://www.scotland.gov.uk)  
[www.successunlimited.co.uk](http://www.successunlimited.co.uk)  
[www.bbc.co.uk/education/archive/bully/](http://www.bbc.co.uk/education/archive/bully/)

- The *Mental Health and Growing Up* series contains 36 factsheets on a range of common mental health problems. To order the pack, contact Book Sales at the Royal College of Psychiatrists, 17 Belgrave Square, London SW1X 8PG; tel: 020 7235 2351, ext. 146; fax: 020 7245 1231; e-mail: [booksales@rcpsych.ac.uk](mailto:booksales@rcpsych.ac.uk), or you can download them from [www.rcpsych.ac.uk](http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk).

They may be ashamed, embarrassed, and may believe that they deserve it. Many children are frightened of telling because they fear the bullies will find out and hurt them even more. It can take great courage to tell an adult.

**Do not blame the child** Being bullied is not their fault (although they may think it is).

**Reassure** them that they were right to tell you.

**Do not promise to keep the bullying a secret** Something must be done about it. Reassure your child that you, and the teachers, will make sure that things do not get worse because they have told you. Tell the school so they can stop it. Teachers don't always know that a child is being bullied. Find out if there is an anti-bullying programme in the school.

**Talk with your child and work out ways of solving the problem** Include your child in decisions about how to tackle the problem. For example, work out some practical ways for them to stop the bullying. You might discuss what they should say back if they are called names, or where it's safe to go at playtime.

## School

Bullying happens in every school, so it is important that each school has an effective anti-bullying programme. Good intentions are not enough. Both pupils and staff need to act when they see a child being bullied. Every school can obtain an anti-bullying pack from the Department for Education and Skills. There are a number of agencies that can offer advice and help in how to set up effective programmes (see above sources of further information).

## Other professionals who can help

Children whose health has been affected may benefit from some specialist help from their general practitioner, school doctor, a social worker or an educational psychologist who will be able to offer help and advice. Children with emotional problems quite often need these to be treated directly, even if the school has managed to stop the bullying. Your general practitioner can refer you to your child to a child and adolescent mental health service.

## References

- Bernstein, J. Y. & Watson, N. W. (1997) Children who are targets of bullying: a victim pattern. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, **12**, 483–497.
- Chesson, R. (1999) Bullying: the need for an interagency response. *BMJ*, **319**, 330 ([www.bmj.com](http://www.bmj.com)).
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