

What to do about teasing and bullying

Parents should always talk to their child's teacher immediately, if they have a concern about bullying.

Teasing and bullying are always a worry for parents and you can be confident nowadays that any report of this by you, any other responsible adult, and any child must be taken seriously by all state schools. Independent schools also follow similar good practice guidelines.

The Government has made tackling bullying in schools a key priority and the [Department for Education \(DFE\)](#) has made clear that no form of bullying should be tolerated. Bullying in schools should be taken very seriously; it is not a normal part of growing up and it can ruin lives.

It is compulsory for schools to have measures in place to encourage good behaviour and respect for others on the part of pupils, and to prevent all forms of bullying. The DFE supports all state schools in designing their anti-bullying policies, and their strategies to tackle bullying, by providing comprehensive practical-guidance documents such as the [Safe to Learn](#) material. Regional advisers with expertise in the field of bullying are also on hand to help.

Schools can also sign up to the [Anti-bullying Charter](#) to show their commitment to tackling all forms of bullying, and use the principles of the Charter to self-evaluate their anti-bullying policies and practices. You may wish to ask your child's teacher if the school has signed up to the document.

In spite of all the progress that has been made in highlighting the problems of bullying, there is some research evidence that children who stammer, as their speech appears to be different, are sadly still quite likely to be the subject of comments or worse by other pupils. This is very upsetting for your child and will undermine his self-esteem.

Further information about bullying and children who stammer

There are three recent articles on this topic

[Summer 2007 issue of 'Speaking Out', pages 5-6](#)

[Spring 2008 issue of 'Speaking Out', page 10-11](#)

[Winter 2009 edition of Speaking Out, page 7](#)

Strategies to help your child

Some parents have taken the view, even with young children that the child should stand up for himself against the bullies, even to the extent of hitting them. This is not good advice to pass on to a child as the situation could escalate and a violent incident take place in which the original victim also suffers. **It is always best to contact the school if you suspect bullying so that proper and effective action can be taken.**

At home you can encourage him to think through the situations and try out the following ideas to help him cope.

Strategies to help your child

There is no universal approach that will help every child and will work in every situation but these ideas are worth trying, if you are worried that your child might be bullied. You must be careful to avoid causing him to worry about bullying when you do this. However, most children do worry about it anyway, so it is likely that he will see your helping him as a positive move.

Role play

Stand tall A good strategy is to get your child to think of a time he felt strong and confident and get him to pretend that he is in that situation again. He should **stand up as tall as he can**, imagining himself feeling really confident with good eye contact. Practising this exercise will help to teach your child that when he stands and feels tall and powerful, a bully will think twice before tackling him.

How a child should react to a bully

Don't react

Bullies want a reaction as it rewards them, and thus they continue, because if there is no reaction, bullying's no fun. This strategy is hard for children to understand at first as they often seek revenge. The advice does not mean that children cannot do anything. They can respond, but not react: no screaming, no bursting into tears, no fighting back. They can act as if the taunts are childish. If something is said to the teachers or bullies it needs to be calm and controlled.

Don't argue

Just agree by using terms such as 'If you say so', or 'I'll have to give that some thought.' Pausing before speaking helps too. Pauses suggest personal power, indicating that the speaker is choosing how to respond. This does not mean never argue, just that the child should not be tricked into arguing on the bully's terms. The child should never put him or herself down. If you don't argue, there can be no conflict. An argument always has two sides. If the child does not take a side, the situation is not an argument. It is just a difference of opinion, and the bully will get bored because there is no reaction.

A log of incidents

Keep a log of everything that your child tells you about any incidents to use when you report bullying to the teacher.

The aim is to identify the bully or bullies every time it happened. You should have dates and times, where it happened, who the bullies were, what they did, how the child responded, who was told, who else saw what happened, any injuries that happened.

When bullying is reported to a teacher, the log of incidents can be shown and it will be apparent how serious and constant the bullying is. Teachers are not always able to help as much as they would like, even when a child has been teased or bullied for some time because evidence is not presented.

Remember to stress that in giving names you are only **alleging** that these individuals were involved, as you must appreciate that you are probably relying on information from your child and he may be mistaken.

Support for your child in the family

A social network of family and friends must be formed, to offer children support in a crisis or when they are upset. Furthermore, if parents succeed in remaining calm whilst not dismissing the bullying, it is easier for the child to take the same attitude, because they feel that the adult believes in their ability to cope with the bullying. Even if children are unable to counter the bullying successfully themselves, adults can give the child confidence in being able to find a successful way of dealing with it in the future. In this way, an important step is taken towards coping with bullying.

This text has drawn upon the following article.

[Summer 2007 issue of 'Speaking Out', pages 5-6](#)

Preventing your child being upset by others

Find out how your child is feeling

It is easier to do this if within the family there has always been openness about stammering and any other problems that your child may meet. Helping him to learn strategies to help will build his confidence.

It is essential that you know that your child is being teased or bullied as soon as possible so chat with him frequently; without making him feel pressurised. Talk gently to discover how he is enjoying school. Make sure you understand his daily activities and relationships. Keep up with the names of the adults that he meets and the children that he works and plays with so that you can follow up his comments with replies of your own. Keep an eye on how he seems to be coping, look out for any signs of anxiety or worry.

A younger child may not be able to even understand exactly why he feels worried about what he is experiencing at school. He may need gentle coaxing at home when he is feeling relaxed to talk about his feelings. Older children, particularly boys, may feel they are being weak if they say anything to their parents about their problems.

Changes in your child's behaviour

Sometimes this talking may not happen and you find that worries are shown through changes in his fluency and/or behaviour at any age. He may struggle more with his speech and be obviously losing confidence. He may be irritable and bad tempered, destructive with his toys or games. In the younger child toileting habits may change or he may go off his food, or simply be difficult generally. All this can be caused by the anxiety he is feeling and you must spend time to find out what is its cause. Even though it may appear trivial to you it may be frightening for your child.

Talk to your child's teacher

As soon as you are concerned talk to your child's teacher, do not decide to wait and see whether your child settles down again. Try to be specific about other children and/or staff involved and use the log of incidents that you have prepared.

Remember to stress that in giving names you are only **alleging** that these individuals were involved, as you must appreciate that you are probably relying on information from your child and he may be mistaken. Other parents will be annoyed if their child is wrongly accused, and staff will not be pleased if they are brought into disrepute without cause. If it is the teacher herself who seems to have upset your child, it is still important to talk with her in a calm manner and hopefully the matter will be put right at this early stage.

This helpful chat may quickly resolve the situation especially if he feels bullied by other children as they can respond very quickly to advice from the teacher. Worrying situations can be nipped in the bud. You can then be reassured that staff are looking out for any more difficulties and know to contact you immediately if they arise.

Bullying policy

The Government has laid down very clear guidelines for the management of teasing and bullying in schools, and every school should have a bullying policy that is based on those guidelines.

This policy is available to you on request, and in many schools you may find it displayed for everyone to see and understand. If you discover that a school has not devised a policy, this is very out of line with government expectations, and is a bad sign. Ideally, the policy should mention that everyone in the school should 'tell' on the bullies and that bullying includes every type of verbal and physical harassment.

It is when you feel that your child is still being teased or bullied even though you have spoken with staff that your approach should be based on this policy. Do not feel that you are being awkward as all schools are expected to respond effectively to these concerns. Hopefully you will still be able to resolve the issue by talking with the teacher.

What you need to know

It should be apparent when you mention your worries about your child being teased or bullied, that the teacher is equally concerned and is clear that the problem lies with the child who is the bully. Do not allow yourself to appear to accept that your child is in any way responsible, unless it is obvious that he has deliberately contributed in some way to an intentional effort to upset another child. When your child is involved in this manner then the way forward needs to be the application of suitable sanctions, followed by a bringing together of the children, after discussion with the parents, so that harmony can be restored.

If your child is bullied in a situation where he has not deliberately upset another child, then no fault must be laid at his door. It is clearly the fault of the bully and that must be the starting point for the intervention.

Nowadays there are approaches that use systems that are based on a 'no blame' approach for the bully, and you need to be certain that you are happy with this attitude when you choose your primary school. It can go badly wrong and if followed may leave your child with a sense of injustice and even fear.

While it is a decision for you, a policy that does blame the bully, and does then have procedures for punishing him, and then building strategies for him to realise how badly he has behaved towards your child is more likely to leave your child feeling supported. After the bully has responded to these strategies, then you can support a coming together of the two children and a way forward to help them build a relationship.

Serious bullying behaviour can be seen as early as Reception and all children may bully others to get attention, show off, or get what they want (school equipment, clothing, or even money). They might be jealous of the children they are bullying. They may also be getting bullied themselves or have seen behaviour at home that they are copying. When pupils begin to call people names, use unkind words, or exclude a child from the friendship group, intervention by staff should take place immediately and consistently to teach acceptable behaviour. Zero tolerance of any sort of harassment is important, so that the bullying does not escalate to physical attacks that can easily get out of hand.

Talking to the children about stammering

If your child's stammer had led to the bullying you could discuss with the teacher how to educate the other children about stammering to show how upset your child has been by the teasing/bullying. You need to talk to your child to make sure that he is comfortable with such an approach. Staff should work with your child's therapist, use leaflets from the BSA or even work in role-play situations that teach the children about diversity. Such learning is very useful for all children and shows your child how his worries can be sorted out once he talks about them, this is a useful message for him to understand as he goes through his education.

Assertiveness techniques

Therapists do commonly work with older children who stammer to help them cope with difficult situations by expressing their reactions in an assertive manner that the other children will respond positively to. Also many schools do already teach these techniques and encourage the children how to explain that they do not like a comment or an action because it is unkind and parents should support this. If you feel that your child would be helped by such an approach it is worth discussing with the teacher what is available in the classroom curriculum to support this.

Usually parents' complaints are quickly resolved in the school by these informal means but if that does not happen then you may wish to follow the formal complaints procedure.

What to say to staff when you are still concerned and think that the bullying needs to be more formally discussed and dealt with

If you feel you need further support contact your local [Parent Partnership](#) service or get their contact details from your local authority. This service is available in every area to provide independent advice to parents of children with special educational needs and may be able to provide a worker who can support you and accompany you to any meetings.

Continue to keep a log of incidents and reactions by staff to support your case, include dates, times and details of actual incidents with names of children and staff involved. It is worth spending time on this and keeping these notes in a special file or envelope as if you pursue a formal complaint the information will be required.

Make a definite appointment to talk to your child's teacher again but this time request that another more senior colleague, such as the member of staff responsible for special educational needs (SENCO) is present. You may find it helpful to take a relative, friend or representative of the Parent Partnership with you who know your child and can give support.

Remember that as a parent you have the right to expect that school staff deal with your concerns about teasing and/or bullying. You should leave the meeting with a definite plan of campaign to deal with the bullying based on the bullying policy and have this explained to you and be satisfied with this before you leave. If you think you would be helped by having written details of what staff will do then ask them to write it down.

In the unlikely event that your concern is still **not** dealt with to your satisfaction, make an appointment to talk to the Headteacher as soon as possible. When you go to this meeting take a written copy of what has been happening so far to leave with the Head and again do not leave the meeting until you are satisfied with what action is proposed, asking for a written copy to keep in your record. Agree on a definite time scale for action to be completed and fix a date for another meeting to review the situation.

Hopefully you will never need to pursue a complaint further than this, it should always be possible for a bullying incident to be resolved within the school.

When you are still concerned

If you are still dissatisfied after 6 to 8 weeks you must consider your options as your child's happiness at such a young age is being undermined.

When you have to make a formal complaint

It is a matter for you whether you want to proceed further with your complaint about a school and take it to a much more formal level. All schools have a policy for dealing with serious complaints on any subject that you can follow. This is described in this resource. This process can be lengthy and stressful for parents and you need to consider seriously whether it is in the best interests of your child and family to do this, when there may be other options for your child's education.

Consider your [options in primary education](#) if you do decide to remove your child from his school and take advice from your child's therapist.

Contacting the police

In very rare cases parents have contacted the police when bullying has become impossible to contain

and their child feels very threatened. A liaison officer who has experience would deal with this sensitive issue, if parents felt that that support from the police was needed.

Contact organisations that provide detailed information on bullying.

A complete list of organisations that can provide help or support on bullying issues is provided in annex I of the overarching [Safe to Learn](#) guidance.

Advice for young people who are concerned about bullying is available on the [DirectGov](#) website. You can also find further information on cyberbullying on this site.

The [Anti-Bullying Alliance](#), an umbrella group of over 60 charitable and other organisations working in the anti-bullying field, has a range of information and resources for practitioners on their website.

Advice for parents on dealing with the bullying of their child is available on the [Parentline Plus](#) website.

Other sources of information

Beatbullying

Working across London, Beatbullying operates youth-led anti-bullying campaigns. Also provides training and anti-bullying tool kits.

Beyond Bullying

Website created by Leicestershire anti-bullying team, has lots of useful information, guidance and resources.

Bully Free Zone

Provides a peer mediation service, written and telephone advice, and provides training for children and young people, parents, teachers, youth workers and other professionals.

Bullying UK (formerly Bullying Online)

Charity providing an email advice service for children and young people as well as lots of online help and information, for schools as well as pupils.

ChildLine

Provides a 24 hour telephone helpline for children and young people. Website features help and advice on bullying.

Children's Legal Centre

Provides legal advice, information, assistance and representation to children, parents and carers, and professionals working with children, on all areas of education law, including bullying.

Kidscape

Charity committed to preventing bullying and child sexual abuse. Produces resources, offers training, provides a helpline and carries out research.

Summary

This is always a worry for parents and you can be confident nowadays that any report of this by you, any other responsible adult, and any child must be taken seriously by all schools.

The Government has made tackling bullying in state schools a key priority and independent school are likely to follow that good practice. The [Department for Education \(DFE\)](#) has made clear that no form of bullying should be tolerated.

Bullying in schools should be taken very seriously; it is not a normal part of growing up and it can ruin lives.

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