enable

empower children. eliminate bullying

BULLYING and your child

What every parent needs to know … and do

Whether parent, carer, teacher or young person, everyone has a part to play in ensuring a safe, happy and empowering environment for children and young people in which they are free from the threat of bullying or discrimination. Research shows that social and emotional skill development is fundamental in achieving this, and that without these skills, children are more at risk of bullying, and of cyber-bullying.

This guide draws on the work of ENABLE – the European network against bullying in learning and leisure environments – and aims to help you:

- Better understand what bullying is and how to spot the warning signs
- Discuss bullying – and cyber-bullying – with your children
- Take steps to help any child who is being bullied
- Ensure your child stays safe online and develops the necessary social and emotional skills
- Work with your school to create a safer environment for young people.

What is bullying?

Bullying is the repetitive, intentional hurting of one person or group by another person or group, where the relationship involves an imbalance of power. Bullying is not a normal part of growing up (although it is common) and should not be accepted. Everyone has the right to feel safe all the time and be treated equally. Bullying can happen anywhere, at any time. It can happen face-to-face or online and can take many forms, including physical violence, threats, mocking, name-calling, and saying unkind or untrue things.

Young people who are bullied:

- Can feel very distressed and powerless to put a stop to it
- Are more at risk of developing mental health problems including depression and anxiety
- May self-harm and even commit suicide
- May do worse at school, lose their ability to make friends
- May be affected for many years and into adulthood

Online bullying or cyberbullying is bullying that takes place using internet-connected computers, phones, games consoles and tablets. It can take place through online social networks and is also common on gaming sites. It might include inappropriate text messaging, e-mailing or blogging, sending offensive or degrading images, excluding individuals from group chat, posting content on social media, or creating false personas to mock or humiliate others. Online bullying can often be worse than offline bullying because it can happen 24 hours a day; it can be very public and very isolating.

KEY INSIGHTS ABOUT BULLYING

FIVE KEY FEATURES OF BULLYING

1. The bully intends to inflict harm or fear upon the victim.
2. Aggression toward the victim occurs repeatedly.
3. The victim does not provoke bullying behaviour by using verbal or physical aggression.
4. Bullying occurs in familiar social groups.
5. The bully is more powerful (either actual or perceived power) than the victim.

STATISTICS RELATED TO CYBERBULLYING

PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS REPORTING HAVING BEEN BULLIED ON THE INTERNET IN THE PREVIOUS 12 MONTHS

All adolescents in EU NET ADB* 21,9%

Female 24,1%

Male 19,5%

20,5% 14-15 years old

24,2% 16-17 years old

*The EU NET ADB project was carried out across Greece, Spain, Poland, Germany, Romania, the Netherlands and Iceland with a representative sample of 14-17 year olds.

PEER SUPPORT

YOUNG PEOPLE NEED TO BE GIVEN OPPORTUNITIES TO:

Work together outside friendship groups, aiming to reduce prejudice and to foster trust across gender and ethnic groups.

Develop communication skills to share information and to reflect on their own emotions in relationships with others.

Deal with conflict and help peers to relate to one another in nonviolent ways.

Icons Designed by Freepik.com and Shutterstock

This information is taken from "Bullying in Schools - A summary of research and anti-bullying initiatives" read the summary report here http://enable.eun.org/report

How can I tell if my child is involved in bullying?

It is not always easy to see when children are involved in bullying. They could be acting as a bully, being bullied or upset as a bystander because they have seen others behaving badly. There is not always a clear distinction between a person being a bully or a victim. Often people who bully have also been bullied.

Look out for these signs of bullying:

→ **External**
- Unexplained bruises or marks on the body
- Broken or missing possessions

→ **Physiological**
- Lack of energy
- Problems sleeping
- Changes in eating habits

→ **Behavioural**
- Being protective over their phone, laptop or tablet and spending more time than usual on them
- Becoming withdrawn
- Becoming aggressive at home

→ **School-related**
- Suddenly doing less well at school
- Being less willing to talk about their day and becoming defensive when asked about it
- Avoiding school, making excuses or claiming they are unwell
- Talking less about friends and seeing them less than usual

Such behaviour could also be due to other reasons, so try to avoid jumping to conclusions
- Is there anything else bothering my child?
- Have there been changes at home like a new baby, or divorce or separation?

Conversation starters

Some children may find it hard to talk about bullying and may not respond well to direct questioning. You could ask open questions such as these:

- Who their friends are and what they like about them
- What lunchtime is like at school - who they sit/play/hang out with
- What parents should do to help stop bullying in schools
- If they had one wish, what would they change and why
- Show a TV programme or video which includes bullying and ask what they think about it.

If your child has difficulties in explaining or communicating about what is happening, you may need to use different ways to communicate, such as through drawings or games.

Find out more in the ENABLE research report at http://enable.eun.org/report

What should I do if my child is being bullied?

Admitting to someone that you are being bullied takes a lot of courage. Many children do not tell their parents about bullying because they are frightened that they will make things worse, by talking to the school for example.

If your child discloses that he or she is being bullied, first of all keep calm: your child is the priority and needs your support to get through the situation; don't blame or punish. Speak calmly and reassuringly. Thank your child for telling you, reassure him or her that things will get better and that you will always be there to talk about problems like this. An open and trusting relationship helps your child feel confident to share concerns with you.

Ask your child what sort of things could be done to stop the bullying and decide on the next steps together. Talk through the pros and cons of these possible next steps and let your child decide on what to do and what he or she feels comfortable doing. Here are some options to consider. They depend on the nature of the bullying and on your child's age, personality and development:

Your child could

- Walk away from the situation and the bullies
- Firmly ask the bully to stop (for example: «I don't like that name, it makes me upset – please don't do it again.») or write a note asking the bully to stop
- Ask a witness or friend to ask them to stop

You could

- Alert school staff to your concerns and ask them to keep a discreet eye on your child
- Formally report the bullying to a teacher or Peer Supporter (a student in the school who has undertaken ENABLE training in reducing bullying in the school), or make a written complaint to the head teacher.

Whichever steps are agreed, it's a good idea to create an action plan with your child of the steps you are going to take to address the bullying and improve the situation.

What can you do as a parent or carer?

- **Tell the child not to retaliate;** a bully is often looking for a reaction.
- **Keep a record:** gather information about the aggressor and the bullying so the harassment can be investigated. If the bullying is online, keep proof by capturing screens, printing out or copying any messages received.
- **Seek help:** sometimes, beyond talking with parents, children may feel the need to talk to third parties. The help of a mental health professional can be precious. It's important to present the child with all the options.
- **Widen your child's friendships and interests:** encourage your child to develop friendships outside school and to take part in activities that build confidence and resilience (e.g. drama and dance, martial arts, team sports, local youth groups).
- **Develop your child's social, emotional and life skills**, for example building resilience: help your child learn from setbacks, handle adversity and develop coping strategies.
- **Involve the police:** if the aggression is severe, including, for example, threats of violence, blackmail/extortion attempts or incentives to self-mutilation or suicide, do not hesitate to contact the local police authorities.
- **Get involved in school anti-bullying activities**.

In addition, if your child is a victim of online bullying, you could:

- **Inform school:** online and offline bullying are often linked and so the bullying may also be happening at school.
- **Get help:** contact your national safer internet centre *www.betterinternetforkids.eu* for help and advice.
- **Take precautions:** block abusive users and follow procedures for reporting abusive content on social networks. Encourage your child to stay safe online, not to spend too much time on social networks and to have a healthy attitude to relationships online.

Get involved in school anti-bullying activities:

- Find out more about what the school's Peer Supporters are focusing on (they may have written an action plan) and see whether there are particular things that parents/carers could get involved in e.g. running campaigns, helping to review the school's policies and procedures around bullying.
- Ask to see school documents such as the bullying and behaviour policies and find out about how they are put into practice.
- Talk to your child about support networks in school and who children can go to if they have a problem.
- Join a class session or whole school meeting on anti-bullying to show your support and learn more about the Peer Supporters' work.
- Think about how you can use your skills to get involved - could you help students make a video to raise awareness, for example, or run a session around public speaking?
- If the school has a parent council or other forum for parents/carers to raise concerns and discuss issues, talk about bullying and encourage parents to think about how they could get involved in anti-bullying work. Use this opportunity to work with the Peer Supporter group to educate other parents/carers around bullying and how to keep their child safe online.

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What if my child is bullying someone?

There can be many reasons why a child is bullying someone: it may not be straightforward. You may feel disappointed or upset that your child has been bullying others. Try to stay calm and take some time to think about concrete actions:

- Calmly explain that what the child is doing is unacceptable.
- Be careful to explain that it is the behaviour, not the child, that is wrong and needs to change.
- Explore what has been happening. Discuss the definitions about the signs of bullying and explore with your child how it would feel if someone was behaving like this towards him or her. Sometimes children – particularly if they have special educational needs or a disability – may not even be aware that their behaviour is bullying.
- Explain what you'll do next, such as talking to the school, and what you expect the child to do (for example apologising or writing a letter to the person being bullied).
- Give the child the time and space to ask any questions about why his/her actions need to change.

How can I help my child stay safe online?

Children can often be under pressure to join the latest social networking sites, use certain apps and have the newest technology. It may not be easy, but aim for rules, dialogue and trust to make sure they stay safe online while having fun:

- **Have rules**, preferably written, that set out age-related expectations of what your children are expected to do and not do, based on 3 Rs: 'Be responsible, be respectful, be respectable'. Encourage them to behave online as they would offline; set some 'digital boundaries'. Drawing up a *'Family media agreement'* may help. (See the example on the next page.)
- **Keep talking** about the websites, social networks and instant messaging your children use – and the risks associated with them – so that you are more aware about what they are doing online. It helps if you are already familiar with these sites and apps.
- **Build trust** - make sure your children know that they can speak to you or someone in their support network if they are being bullied or feel uncomfortable about something. Show them what they can do if they have a problem online such as knowing how to block or report someone.

In discussions, make sure your children understand the risks related to contact, communication and conduct:

- **Contact:** only make friends with people online they know and trust, and never meet up with someone that they don't know, unless you or another trusted adult is present.
- **Communication:** everyone has a 'digital footprint' that does not disappear, and information, photos and videos posted online can be misused by other people. Privacy settings on social media sites and apps can be adjusted; these determine who sees the information your children share and who can contact them.
- **Conduct:** they should learn to be careful about what they share, especially personal details such as phone numbers or home address – *Think before you post!* They should not share their passwords, should change them regularly and not have the same one for every account.

Here is an example of a family media agreement that you can adapt for your family.

Family Media Agreement

Child or Young Person

→ I agree to:

- Use my devices responsibly.
- Be a good digital citizen: to use technology and Internet responsibly and in a safe manner.
- Be respectful to others and not put anything online that I wouldn't want my parents, teachers, college admissions officers or future bosses to see.
- Respect the limits of time that I can spend on the computer, tablet, smartphone or playing video games.
- Not use language that bullies or upsets anyone else online.
- Block, report, unfriend anyone that makes me feel uncomfortable and I will let my parents know.
- Not share my personal information or the information of others.

→ I understand that not everything I read or see online is true.

Parent or carer

→ I agree to:

- Listen to your concerns about social media and your online activities.
- Talk with you about what worries me and explain why I am saying 'no.'
- Respect your privacy and talk with you about any issues that I may have.
- Modify our agreement as you grow older and show maturity and judgment in your Internet use.

→ I understand that the internet and technology are a big part of your life.

Family

→ We agree to these conditions because we love each other and we want our family to be safe online.

How to help your children develop their social and emotional skills?

Social and emotional skills include:

- Self-awareness and acceptance
- Empathy (being able to see and feel things from another point of view)
- Being able to manage emotions
- Being able to manage relationships.

How we manage our emotions can really impact on our quality of life and how we behave towards others. Helping our children to have solid social and emotional skills will help them in their current and future relationships, dealing with stressful situations and being resilient when things are difficult, such as if they are being bullied.

Managing emotions starts with you: what your children see you do is what they will do. Think about how you respond to stressful situations and how you can model good emotional intelligence.

Actively listen to your children's feelings. Help them to understand that it's ok to feel sad, angry or upset sometimes. Once they have accepted and dealt with the feelings, they can think about what caused the emotions and how to deal with the problem.

Teach your children to act in a caring way towards others, get along with fellow students, manage angry feelings and be assertive without being aggressive when standing up for themselves and others.

Encourage them to reflect on their feelings and behaviours in different situations. For example, ask them to think about how they feel when they see somebody being unkind to someone else.

Help them understand how a positive mindset can influence their responses and feelings: they have the power to change their emotional response to situations.

Help children talk about difficult things

All children have things they find hard to discuss and this is where they most need your support. Having a regular time when they can bring up things that may be bothering them can really help.

Steps to nurture emotional intelligence in your children and increase their self-awareness and build self-esteem by talking about:

1. their good qualities
2. what the best thing is about your family
3. their goals and ambitions
4. the traits they admire in others

About ENABLE

ENABLE is coordinated by European Schoolnet and takes place in a number of countries including Belgium, Croatia, Denmark, Greece and the United Kingdom. It aims to reduce bullying; empower and inform young people; enhance relationships between students, teachers and parents; and promote a more positive climate in schools where students feel safe.

Schools taking part in ENABLE:

1. Implement a Peer Support scheme which involves students running campaigns and activities that help prevent bullying, encourage positive behaviour and support vulnerable students.
2. Review policies and procedures related to bullying and behaviour, making sure they are student friendly, understood and used by the whole school community.
3. Promote a supportive culture in school, where students treat each other with kindness and respect.
4. Run activities, campaigns and lessons which encourage students to reflect on their behaviour and increase their emotional intelligence.

http://enable.eun.org

As a parent, one of the most important things you can do is to maintain a close and open relationship with your children so that they feel able to talk to you about any concerns. We hope this guide provides you with lots of tips and tools to do this.

ENABLE Partners:

ENABLE Associate and Supporting Partners:

For further information visit enable.eun.org or email info-enable@eun.org.