

What to do when a child is bullied: a guide for parents & carers

1. Stay calm.

It is natural to feel worried, angry, upset and overwhelmed if your child is being bullied. It is tempting to get angry with the school or confront other parents, but this rarely helps your child.

Parents & carers can help stop bullying by a) creating a safer environment around the child in school and online, and b) building the child's self-confidence. Parents & carers tend to get the best results by staying calm, researching their options, and deciding the best way forwards in collaboration with their child.

It may be helpful to organise practical support (such as requesting a friend to come with you to school meetings), and emotional support (such as calling [Supportline](#)), for yourself during this challenging time.

2. Reassure your child that it is not their fault they are being bullied, and work together to find solutions.

Many children believe that they are being bullied because there is something 'wrong' with them e.g. their appearance. This can negatively affect their self-esteem and mental health. Reassure your child that there is no excuse for making others feel bad, and it is the child or children doing the bullying need to change their behaviour.

It is also important to work with your child to think about potential solutions to the bullying, or actions that may help. Ask them how it makes them feel, what they need from you and what would help them to feel safe in the place where bullying is happening. This helps them to feel in control of the situation and more likely to reveal what is happening.

Your child may worry that if the school is informed, they will be called a snitch and they will feel even less safe. However, if adults don't intervene, the bullying may not stop. In such situations, parents & carers may need to find compromises. For example, if a child doesn't want to name the children, can they say what will help them feel safer e.g. moving to a different class or going to a pre-arranged safe space? [See list of potential solutions to bullying in section 5.2].

For more support:

Guides on how to talk to children about bullying [here](#) and [here](#).

You can download accessible guides for talking to autistic children about bullying [here](#) ("Bullying. Why me?", "What to do if I'm being bullied", "Talking about bullying")

[Here](#) is a guide for the parents and carers of autistic children experiencing bullying.

3. Record the bullying incidents in writing

Keep a written record of the details of the bullying incidents – who, what, where, when, and how it affected your child. This evidence is extremely useful for spotting patterns (e.g. usually happens in a corner of the playground during break time). It is invaluable when speaking to schools and other

professionals, or making a complaint, because it makes the situation clearer and encourages others to treat it seriously.

Add screenshots if the bullying is online or on mobile phones. Add pictures of injuries if it is physical. See list of what counts as bullying [here](#). The impact of bullying can include feeling scared of going to school, withdrawal, anxiety, not eating, insomnia and lashing out at others.

Here is an example [log](#).

You can check that the school are recording the bullying incidents you are reporting on their system and ask (in writing) to see your child's records. More info about this [here](#) (Child Law Advice).

4. Understand your rights if your child fears going to school.

Children who are experiencing bullying can fear going to school. If you believe your child is not safe at school (if they are at serious risk of physical or mental harm), you can choose to temporarily not send them to school. Your child's safety comes first.

Schools can give fines and take legal action against parents who don't send their children to school for 'unauthorised' reasons. However, not attending school due to illness (which includes mental health issues like anxiety), is an authorised reason. If you decide to keep your child home, we recommend writing to the school immediately and asking the absence to be recorded as "due to illness". You may find it helpful to use this [Bullying related absence template letter](#).

You might be asked for medical evidence to prove to the school that the absence is due to illness. Schools are only supposed to do this if they have doubts about whether the child is ill. You can provide evidence in the form of appointment cards, prescriptions, or a letter from your GP. If your child is experiencing mental health difficulties (such as anxiety, depression, or fear), you can speak to your GP about what support is available for them.

If your child misses school, we also strongly recommend arranging a [meeting](#) with the school as soon as possible to decide how to help them return safely [See section 5 on creating a safety plan]. If nothing is done by the school to stop the bullying, it can become increasingly difficult for your child to return.

For more support:

The parent/carer led organisation [Not Fine in School](#) has advice if your child is refusing to go to school, and a supportive Facebook [group](#). They have information about the legalities around absence due to bullying [here](#) [Not Fine in School, sections 2 & 3].

5. Work with the school to create a safe and supportive environment around your child.

Schools have a legal duty to keep your child safe from harm (physical and mental) by preventing all types of bullying and harassment.

Specifically:

"Maintained schools (funded by local authorities) must have measures to encourage good behaviour and prevent all forms of bullying amongst pupils. These measures should be part of the school's behaviour policy which must be communicated to all pupils, school staff and parents" [Section 89 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006].

“The proprietor of an Academy or other independent school is required to ensure that an effective anti-bullying strategy is drawn up and implemented” [The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014].

This means that if bullying and/or cyberbullying (even if it is outside school hours) is reported to them, they need to take action to stop it and help your child feel safe.

Bullying is also named in [Keeping Children Safe in Education](#) as a form of child-on-child abuse. Using phrases like safeguarding, abuse and keeping your child safe, can help encourage the school to take appropriate action.

5.1. Read the school's behaviour policy/ anti-bullying policy to understand your child's rights

All schools will have a behaviour policy (and sometimes a separate anti-bullying policy) to explain their approach to behaviour and bullying. It will tell you whom you need to speak to and what the school is supposed to do to stop the bullying. It should be freely available on the school's website, or from the office.

We recommend reading these, and preferably printing them out so you can highlight relevant sections. It can be useful to take these documents with you when you meet the school – if it is in their policy, they need to do it. If they don't, you could make a formal complaint.

Useful school policies include:

- Anti-Bullying policy
- Behaviour policy
- Safeguarding policy
- Well-being policy
- Equality and diversity policy
- Mental health policy
- Complaints policy

5.2. Ask the school to create a written safety plan for your child

We recommend writing to the school to ask for a face-to-face meeting to discuss solutions. Identify the best person to meet; the class teacher, head of year, safeguarding officer or headteacher (the school's behaviour policy may tell you this), and address the letter to them. If you have verbal conversations, follow up with an email so that you have written evidence.

In the meeting, being calm, polite and assertive may be the most effective approach. Tell the school that you want to work with them to solve the problem but expect action. It's their legal responsibility to do something and you have every right to stand up for your child's rights.

You can take someone with you for support. Explain what happened and the impact on your child (a [log](#) of incidents is helpful here). Agree with the school exactly what they will do to help your child feel safe and get it written down– this is the safety plan. Focus on what support the school can put in place to help your child, and address the bullying behaviour. Read this page [here](#) on how to have a successful safety plan meeting with the school.

Sometimes, schools don't agree that a situation is bullying; they may call it a friendship fallout for instance. You can show them the definitions of different types of bullying [here](#). Alternatively, you can say that whether or not it is bullying, your child is suffering from negative impacts and doesn't feel

safe at school (a [log](#) of incidents is helpful here). Keeping children safe is a school's legal responsibility, so you can ask them to create a written safety plan (with your input) to help your child feel safe.

You and your child can make suggestions about what goes into the safety plan. You can ask the school to do what is in their behaviour or other relevant policies. You can use your log of bullying incidents to identify patterns and solutions e.g. if your child often gets bullied during break time, can this time can be supervised more closely by staff. You can ask you child what they need to feel safe and take a look at the below list of interventions which have worked for other children experiencing bullying

- The school sends work home temporarily as part of a plan to gradually help the child return to school.
- Designating a 'safe' person that the young person can speak to if they are worried at school or need to report an incident. This should be someone the young person chooses, likes and trusts, such as a teacher, teaching assistant, or a member of the pastoral team. The safe person should know exactly what to do next - listen empathetically, record the incident in writing, and/or contact parents. It may be helpful for the child to know this procedure too.
- If there are particular times of day/places where the bullying is happening more, such as at break time, extra supervision or support could be offered to your child at these times.
- Not having to attend certain lessons or sit with particular groups.
- Changing class or changing the class of the child doing the bullying.
- Starting school a bit later than others and leaving a bit earlier.
- If a child fears being called a snitch for reporting bullying, teachers might agree to keep a sharp lookout so that they see or overhear the bullying themselves. This way, no child is blamed for reporting it.
- Agreeing a 'safe place' they can go if they need a break. This can be the office of someone they trust, a library, or a quiet room.
- Sitting exams in a smaller room like a teacher's office to reduce stress.
- Agreeing a special card/signal (for example, a certain book that could be handed to the teacher) that that allows them to leave a classroom unquestioned if they need to. There should be a plan in place for where they can go and when, but it means that they don't feel trapped in a class for an hour.
- Joining small group activities at break and lunch times that could provide some distance from the bullying situation and help your child to build new relationships.
- The school can contact the parents of the perpetrators and ask for their support in stopping the bullying.
- Friendship agreements – where the perpetrators, and possibly their parents, are asked to sign an agreement saying that nothing more will be shared. The agreement outlines the sanctions/penalties that will occur if the agreement is broken (detention, suspension, expulsion, reporting it to the police)
- Pastoral support
- Does the school have a peer mentoring scheme, or could they provide a trained peer mentor for your child? A peer mentor is an older pupil who looks out for other children and can be someone they can speak to. Kidscape offers peer mentoring [training](#)
- Restorative approaches or mediation – Sometimes it is helpful to have a restorative approach or mediation (with a trained professional) between the bullied child and the perpetrators as part of this process. It is vital that your child consents to this.
- Year assembly – The Head can call an assembly for the whole year group or school to communicate school policies about bullying and cyberbullying, including what is defined as bullying, how to report it, and what the sanctions/penalties are.

- Provide training on bullying awareness or respectful relationships for the whole year group or school. This training can create a safer and more supportive culture for everyone because it teaches all pupils to recognise bullying, stand up to it, and support those who are bullied. Depending on where in the country the school is, Kidscape may be able to offer free bullying awareness workshops for years 5-8. The school can [contact](#) Kidscape directly to ask about this, and other organisations also provide such training.
- Some organisations, like [EACH](#), provide training to school staff and school children on tackling homophobia. This can help to create a supportive culture and reduce homophobia.
- Staff training – Is staff training on anti-bullying up-to-date? Bullying training can help create a safer, more supportive culture for everyone. Kidscape and other organisations provide [training](#) on recognising bullying and responding positively for school children, school staff and governors.
- School policy – If there are no clear existing policies on bullying/cyberbullying, the school can develop or update them. [Here](#) is Kidscape’s guide to developing or updating a school anti-bullying policy.

Make sure that agreed actions are written down by the school and shared with all relevant members of staff, including all your child’s teachers. Having a written record makes it much easier to keep schools accountable and remind them to do things if they fail to act. We also recommend taking your own notes or asking if you can record the meeting.

Agree time scales in which the school will put these measures in place and request a follow up meeting on an agreed date to check that the bullying situation has been resolved.

5.3. What to do if the school doesn’t take effective action

It is very frustrating when schools are not as helpful as they should be. Try to be calm and assertive with the school and be clear that you need to work together until the bullying stops.

You can follow the school’s complaints policy and make a formal complaint. This raises the issue to the school’s governors or academy’s trustees and may make them take action. It may be helpful to find out which governor/trustee is the safeguarding lead and make sure they are aware of the issue. We have advice here on how to escalate a [complaint](#).

See section 6 for when you can contact the police and your local authority’s children’s safeguarding services.

If despite making a complaint, the bullying remains unresolved, you can consider legal action. [Childlawadvice](#), [Justforkidslaw](#) and [Children’slegalcenter](#) provide legal advice on educational law. Dan Rosenberg at Simpson Millar is an educational law specialist (contact Kidscape if you would like his contact details).

6. When to speak to the police

Bullying itself is not a specific criminal offence in the UK. However, violence & assault, theft, harassment, sexual offences, intimidation over a period of time, inciting a person to self-harm and hate crimes are illegal. Hate crimes include incidents motivated by hostility or prejudice towards disability, race, religion, sexuality or transgender identity. Bullying which involves any of these can be reported to the police by calling 999 (in an emergency) and 101 otherwise. You can call 101 and just ask for advice without reporting a crime.

The response of the police varies by area. The Police may be able to speak with the school, perpetrator, and their parents to emphasise the seriousness of their actions and encourage action.

7. Consider whether your child would be happier in another school or with a different educational setting

Legally, young people up to the age of 16 must receive a suitable education at school or elsewhere.

If your child's current school does not stop the bullying and help your child feel safe, changing to a different school or educational setting may be the best option for your child's welfare. Don't remove your child from the School Roll until you've explored all options, talked it through with your child, family and support networks, and have secured a place/alternative solution. More [here](#).

7.1. Changing schools

Good schools recognise that bullying happens everywhere, have proactive strategies to prevent it (such as regularly talking to young people about bullying and positive relationships), and have effective strategies to stop bullying when it does happen. Ofsted ratings don't give a full picture of how effective a school is going to be at tackling bullying. We encourage visiting the school with your child and speaking to the safeguarding and pastoral staff about what they do to stop bullying and support children who are bullied. Options for changing schools include:

- Make an in-year application to another school (look on your Local Authority's website under "admissions").
- In some areas of the country, there are 'In-year access panels'. These are monthly meetings between local headteachers to discuss whether they can move pupils between schools and offer places to new pupils. You can ask the admissions officer if they have these in your area and how to apply. They tend to prioritise vulnerable children, such as those in care, or with SEND. You may be able to make a case for your child being given a place, for example, by providing a letter from your GP. Contact [ACE education](#) to find out more. They can provide expert advice on getting school places. They have a free helpline for parents and carers on 0300 0115 142 – open Mondays and Tuesdays 10am-1pm during term time - or you can email them at enquires@ace-ed.org.uk providing some details so they can give you the right advice. They are kind, knowledgeable and confidential.
- If there is a school that would be really suitable for your child, but is full, there are organisations that may be able to help you appeal for a place; contact Kidscape if you would like the contact details. You must have evidence to show that bullying took place and that you have followed the old school's full complaints procedure.

7.2. Changing educational setting

- Local Authorities have a statutory duty to make alternative arrangements to educate a child if they are out of school for a valid reason for more than 15 days. Section 19 of the Education Act 1996 says that if a child of compulsory school age cannot attend school for reasons of illness (including the physical and mental effects of bullying), after 15 days the Local Authority must make arrangements to provide suitable education either at school or elsewhere. Your Local Authority should have a team called admissions, or something like education inclusion, entitlement, welfare, or support. You can find their details on your Local Authority's website

or by calling their main switchboard phone number. Contact them and request that they provide education as part of their Section 19 duty for children who are out of school due to peer-on-peer abuse (the legal term for bullying). They should be able to tell you what options they can provide.

[More](#): Getting temporary education put in place [IPSEA].

- There are organisations who provide education online for children who don't feel able to go to school. [Red Balloon](#) is one such organisation that works with children who are off school due to bullying and also has a dedicated SEN team. They can help parents to apply for LA funding (chances of getting it depend on situation and area), or can be paid for privately. Other education providers include: NISAI, My Online Schooling, Briteschool, Interhigh, Apricot Learning Centre; Academy 21 and Ed Lounge.
- Home schooling: Home education is legal in the UK and can be a temporary solution while you wait for a new school place, or you may feel it is the best option for your child long-term. It needs to be done to a certain standard and you will need to go through certain processes to ensure the authorities are aware your child is being home educated. It works well for some families, but it isn't suitable for everyone. [Education Otherwise](#) provides information about the law and a directory of local groups who may be able to support your child's home education. Many local areas have Facebook Groups for support and information on local activities and services for home educating families.

8. Act on cyberbullying

Cyberbullying can accompany real-life bullying. It can happen on computers, phones and gaming platforms. There are lots of good online guides for parents on what to do. Start [here](#).

9. Build self-confidence

Your child may benefit from additional emotional support to recover from the impact of being bullied. Below are some suggestions:

- Help them think about people in school who are on their side and can help them. This may be other children or teachers they like and trust.
- Encourage them to take part in activities that make them feel good about themselves and give them a chance to make friends.
- Build friendships outside school. You could invite class friends to spend time with your child away from the children who are doing the bullying.
- [ZAP](#) workshop – Kidscape runs free, 90-minute, online confidence building workshops called [ZAP](#) to support young people aged 9-16 who have experienced bullying. The workshop is positive, empowering and receives good reviews from young people. It explores how it is not a young person's fault if they are bullied and teaches assertiveness skills that can be used in daily life to help prevent bullying, such as confident body language and saying "no". They will be in a small group with other young people who have also experienced bullying. Young people don't have to switch on their camera or say anything if they don't want to. There is also a free accompanying workshop for parents/carers to learn about bullying and how to help their child practice the assertiveness techniques. Workshop dates are [here](#). Sign up form [here](#).

- Young people may not fully understand the difference between healthy and unhealthy friendships, such as what is and isn't acceptable behaviour and how to kindly enforce healthy boundaries. Kidscape's [A Parent's Guide to Friendship](#) has been written by parents for parents about how to help children with their friendships. There is also advice written directly for young people – see "[Friendships and frenemies](#)", "[What](#) makes a good friend", and "[How](#) to deal with friends who are bullying you".
- If they want someone to talk to in addition to talking to you, let them know that there are trusted charities they can speak to anonymously. Some children may find it easier to speak to someone they don't know about the difficult feelings around being bullied.
 - [Childline](#) is an understanding and supportive charity who have lots of experience in supporting bullied children. Young people can contact them directly and anonymously, 24/7, by phone, email, online chat or [message board](#). They have advice on coping with bullying and cyberbullying [here](#).
 - [The Mix](#) supports young people under 25 with a range of issues including bullying. Young people can contact them directly and anonymously.
 - [Tellmi](#) is a free app for young people to anonymously speak to other young people who are going through similar difficulties in order to support each other – it is moderated for safety.
- If the bullying has affected your child's mental health (for example, they are scared or anxious or have low self-esteem), don't be afraid to get them mental health support. This can really help them to deal with the difficult feelings that come with being bullied and build self-confidence. If a child has been seriously affected by bullying, a reputable psychologist who has training in dealing with trauma might be helpful. You can access counselling/psychotherapy by:
 - Asking your school for pastoral support (this may or may not be of sufficiently high quality to help).
 - Speaking to your GP or Local Authority's Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) (there may be a waiting list).
 - Various charities offer counselling; find them through [Youth Access](#) and [Hub of hope](#).
 - You can also find private counsellors via professional directories such as [BACP](#) or [NCS](#) (charges will apply but these are likely to have the shortest waiting times).
 - [Victim Support](#) is a national charity which gives free and confidential help to victims of crime, witnesses, their family, friends and anyone else affected. They are not a government agency or part of the police and you don't have to report a crime to the police to get their help. You can call any time after the crime has happened, whether it was yesterday, last week or several years ago.