

## Handout for carers and adoptive parents

### Bullying

When using this handout it may be helpful to consider the following questions:

- 1 What is the exact age and stage of development of the child or young person?
- 2 What changes have taken place in your lives recently?
- 3 How well can the child or young person communicate their needs to you?
- 4 Is there anything in the child's background that would influence their behaviour?
- 5 Is there anything in your background that would influence their behaviour?
- 6 What do you think the child's expectations are of you?

3.2

- Bullying can be:
  - Verbal: name calling, persistent teasing, mocking, taunting and threats.
  - Physical: any form of physical violence, intimidating behaviour, theft or the intentional damage of possessions. This includes hitting, kicking and pushing.
  - Emotional: excluding, tormenting, ridiculing, humiliation and spreading rumours.
  - Cyber: the use of the internet or a mobile phone to cause harm. This can include abuse messages, sharing personal pictures or information without consent, impersonation and creating websites or social media profiles which intend to humiliate or threaten someone.
  - Racist: bullying based on ethnicity, skin colour, language, religious or cultural practices.
  - Homophobic: bullying based on sexuality and/or gender identity.
  - Sexual: unwelcome sexual actions or remarks that are intended to cause offence, humiliation or intimidation.

(The above text was used with permission and was taken from the Kidscape website 'Advice: Facts about bullying' [www.kidscape.org.uk](http://www.kidscape.org.uk))

If bullying is not reported and stopped, it can lead to low self-esteem, anxiety, isolation, lower academic achievement, depression and in severe cases, threatened or attempted suicide.

- Watch out for signs that the child is bullying or being bullied. This may not be immediately obvious.

## Possible signs of bullying:

- being unwilling to go to school
- becomes more withdrawn at home
- begins truanting
- school work deteriorates
- becomes distressed or anxious, or stops eating
- possessions regularly go missing/get destroyed, or loses lunch money or acquires possessions or money
- begins to bully other children or siblings and behaviour becomes aggressive/unreasonable
- unexplained scratches or bruises.

## Understanding the child's behaviour

It may be useful to think through some of the following questions in order to enable you to build up a more informed picture of what is happening for the child. This will enable you to get in tune with the child.

### **Is there anything in the child's background that could influence their behaviour?**

- Think about the child's early caregiving experiences
- Do they view adults as being trustworthy?

This may impact on how able the child is to communicate their worries/anxieties to you or other adults.

### **What were the dynamics of their early caregiving environment?**

- E.g. physical abuse, chastising, scapegoating, ridiculing, unpredictability, being overlooked/neglected? – This may impact on the way the child views themselves and others and their expectations of adults.

### **How able is the child to form and maintain friendships?**

- This may impact on how they present in a group or the role they take on in a group, e.g. are they the class clown, do they dominate other children, are they very withdrawn and get very left out?
- It may be useful to observe the child's interactions with other children to gain a more comprehensive picture of the dynamics of the relationship.

### **How does the child view themselves?**

- This may impact on the way they relate to others, e.g. if the child has low self-esteem and does not feel good about themselves, they may expect they will not be accepted by others or they may try and compensate for this by bullying others in order to feel powerful.

## What changes have taken place in your life recently?

- E.g. child moving to a new placement, change of school, new teacher, parental stress or change/friction, change in family lifestyle
- Changes can impact on the child and lead them to feeling unsettled, anxious or out of control
- It is useful to think about even small changes that, whilst on the surface, may not seem of particular significance, can impact on the child.

3.2

## Is there anything in your background that may influence your thoughts/responses about bullying?

- What messages do you communicate to the child about bullying, e.g. if a carer experienced bullying as a child, they may encourage the child to stand up for themselves, or become over-protective of them
- Being able to recognise your own triggers will be important in determining how you respond to the child.

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### Bullying – Advice

- Arrange to see the teacher. When talking to the teacher stay calm, be specific, make a note of what the school intends to do and ask if you can support the school in any way. Ask to see the school's anti-bullying policy
- Support the school by discussing alternative strategies with the child, e.g. support for the child at break times
- If you do not think your concerns are being dealt with, contact your school nurse and make an appointment to see a school governor or the head teacher.

#### What school can do:

- treat problem seriously and investigate the incident
- interview bullies and victims separately and interview any witnesses
- inform teacher and family
- keep written records
- follow up
- hold assembly or other intervention about bullying.

#### Advice for bullies:

- encourage bully to change his/her behaviour
- investigate bully's history, may be issues of abuse, domestic violence, learning difficulty or previous bullying
- ensure that school have spoken to carers and have been given advice for support for the child.

#### Advice for victims:

- stay with a crowd – you are less vulnerable
- try to ignore or laugh at comments or teasing, or shout GO AWAY
- always tell a teacher or your carers or another safe adult – it is never WRONG to tell.

Always keep accurate records of any intervention, ensure good communication between school carers and pupils. Remember, both bullied and bully may be victims and unresolved issues for both can lead to serious emotional problems in the future.

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#### Further reading

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Kidscape (2001) *Preventing Bullying: A Parents' Guide*. Small charge for leaflet, see website for details:  
<https://kidscape.org.uk/our-shop/booklets-and-leaflets/preventing-bullying/>

Kidscape (2005) *Stop Bullying: Practical advice for everyone*. Available at:  
<http://www.beyondbullying.com/uploads/stopbullying.pdf>

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### Helpful organisations

- **Childline:** 24-hr helpline 0800 1111 for children in distress. Website: [www.childline.org.uk](http://www.childline.org.uk)
- **Parentline:** Open Mon–Sat 09.00–18.00. 01702 559900/554782
- **The Samaritans:** 24-hr helpline for suicidal/depressed. 08457 909090
- **Young Minds:** 0800 018 2138. Open Mon–Fri 10.00–13.00 and 14.00–17.00. Confidential service for those worried about the emotional well-being of young person. Website: [www.youngminds.org.uk](http://www.youngminds.org.uk)
- **Kidscape:** 152 Buckingham Palace Road, London, SW1 9PR. Helpline for parents/carers: 08451 205204. Counselling line 020 7730 3300 available 10.00–16.00. Website: [www.kidscape.org.uk](http://www.kidscape.org.uk)
- **DCFS Parentline Plus:** helpline on 0808 800 2222. Website: [www.parentscentre.gov.uk](http://www.parentscentre.gov.uk) or [www.antibullying.net](http://www.antibullying.net) (also useful for teachers and professionals)
- **Exploring parenthood:** Advice line for issues parents face. Open Mon–Fri 10.00–16.00. 020 7221 6681
- **Black Mental Health Resource Centre:** Help in English, Punjabi and Urdu. 0113 237 4229
- **Asian Family Counselling Service:** 020 8997 5749 (any issues)
- **Pace:** 020 7700 1323 counselling service for lesbian and gay people
- **Anti-bullying Alliance:** [www.anti-bullying.org.uk](http://www.anti-bullying.org.uk)
- **Your local learning disability service.**