DEALING WITH BULLYING

INFORMATION FOR PARENTS OF DISABLED CHILDREN



contact

"You're not the only one in this situation. And you don't have to handle it on your own – support is out there. You will come out the other side."

Parent carer

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INTRODUCTION

Parents can feel a range of emotions when they find out their child is being bullied. These can include feelings of anger, sadness, isolation and guilt. You are not alone, there is a way forward and support to manage your feelings. This guide will help you understand what to do next and where to go for further help.

In this guide we use the term 'disabled children'. We use this term to include disabled children, children with special educational needs, children with a medical condition and children with additional needs.

We have worked with a number of parent carers, including membership of the Contact Steering Group for the Anti-bullying project and parent carers attending our workshops. We thank them for sharing their insight and experiences.

WHAT IS BULLYING?

The Anti-Bullying Alliance (ABA) defines bullying as 'the repetitive, intentional hurting of one person by another, or by a group, where the relationship involves an imbalance of power. Bullying can be carried out physically, verbally, emotionally or through cyberspace.'

It leads to an outcome which is always painful and/or distresses.

Bullying can take place anywhere: in schools, in the wider community and online. Although bullying can take place between two people, it often involves the presence of others.

Bullying is often aimed at people who are different, for example because of race, religion, disability or sexuality. Bullying can be:

- **verbal:** name calling, insulting, teasing
- **physical:** pushing, shoving, hitting, kicking, damage to personal property and belongings
- **indirect:** spreading nasty stories, exclusion from friendship groups, rumour spreading
- **cyberbullying:** sending nasty text messages, email, Facebook and other social media posts, sharing photos on forums, websites and instant messages.

Disabled children may also experience forms of bullying like:

- **manipulative bullying:** where a person is controlling someone
- **conditional friendship:** where a child thinks someone is being their friend but times of friendliness are alternated with times of bullying
- **exploitative bullying:** where features of a child's condition are used to bully them.

THE EFFECTS OF BULLYING

THE EFFECTS ON YOUR CHILD

Being bullied is a horrible experience for any child, but the impact on disabled children may be different. For example, a child with communication difficulties may already find it hard to mix with others in social situations. If they are bullied, they may become more withdrawn and miss out on opportunities to develop their confidence and social skills.

THE EFFECTS ON YOU

Parents we spoke to felt a range of emotions after finding out their child was being bullied – anger, guilt and anxiety. It is natural to have these feelings but there are things you can do to help cope:

- ***share how you are feeling, with family and friends. Consider peer support through online forums and social media***
- ***if there is a support group for your child's condition, get in touch. They will probably be supporting other parents with similar experiences***
- ***remember you're not alone and the bullying can be resolved***
- ***reassure yourself that you're doing a good job***
- ***contact your local parent carer forum for support from other parents in your area***
- ***get support from anti-bullying organisations. See page 17.***
- ***enjoy time together as a family.***

THE EFFECTS ON SIBLINGS

Bullying can impact on the whole family. Children and young people who have disabled siblings or relatives can also be affected by bullying. They may experience bullying because of their sibling's or relative's disability. Some families we speak to have experienced this.

It's important to keep talking about the situation within the family and also to get outside help to deal with the bullying. Your child may try to protect their sibling at school, so let the school know what is happening.

Our **Siblings** guide has information on how brothers and sisters can be supported and some of the typical issues that come up. Download it from our website or contact our helpline for a free copy.

"On the one hand she felt so protective, so defensive of her sibling. On the other huge resentment – he was causing her to get this grief which was out of her control."
Parent carer

"We make bullying a point of discussion rather than a taboo issue. We talked about what she should be saying to people, how to explain his condition. Hopefully it made it clearer about how to explain it and her stronger to deal with it."
Parent carer



SPOTTING THE SIGNS OF BULLYING

It can be hard to know if your child is being bullied. Some children hide their feelings and don't find it easy to tell an adult what is happening. They may be worried about your reaction and scared about telling someone at the school. Children with communication difficulties may not understand they are being bullied or could struggle to tell someone what is happening.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

We asked parents how they realised their child was being bullied. They came up with a number of signs to look for:

- ***becoming withdrawn, if previously outgoing***
- ***coming home with cuts and bruises***
- ***regularly coming home with torn or missing clothing***
- ***refusing to go to school or a youth club***
- ***doing less well at their schoolwork***
- ***changes in mood – becoming depressed, angry, anxious***
- ***changes in behaviour, for example wetting the bed if they have been dry at night***
- ***being aggressive at home with their siblings and other family members***
- ***sleep problems, nightmares, early or late waking***
- ***getting more headaches, stomach aches and other minor illnesses***
- ***immersing themselves more into obsession and fantasy***
- ***self-harming, cutting, hair pulling, skin picking***
- ***wanting to change their journey or time of their journey to school.***

These signs may not always be due to bullying. Changes in your child's behaviour could be caused by other things at school or home, but it's important to find out more.

"My son was a victim of 'happy slapping' but didn't tell us about it because he thought the boys were being his friends. We found out about it through a friend whose daughter had come home crying as she was so upset about what she had witnessed."

Parent carer

"She struggles with friendships and sustaining friendships. She's lost her self-esteem."

Parent carer

TALKING TO YOUR CHILD

If your child tells you they are being bullied, it's natural to be angry and upset, but it's important to respond to your child calmly and quietly. If your child sees you upset they may feel anxious and not tell you everything that's happened.

If you think your child is being bullied, try to talk to them about it. Some children will find it hard to talk about it and may not respond to direct questions – there some tips overleaf.

TIPS FOR TALKING TO YOUR CHILD

If you think your child is being bullied, you could ask the following types of questions:

- ***what did you do at school today?***
- ***who did you play with?***
- ***what did you play?***
- ***did you enjoy it?***
- ***would you have liked to play with someone else or play different games?***
- ***what did you do at lunchtime?***
- ***is there anyone that you don't like at school? Why?***
- ***is there anything that you don't like about school?***
- ***are you looking forward to going to school tomorrow?***

Ask questions to suit the needs of your child. The type of questions you ask may depend on the age of your child, their level of understanding and their anxiety about the situation.

> *"When I asked about the bruises he would lie and say he fell over. Eventually after some gentle questioning from us, he then said what happened."*
> **Parent carer**

> *"I drew a diagram of a body and asked him to show me what had happened to him."*
> **Parent carer**

IF YOUR CHILD HAS DIFFICULTIES EXPLAINING WHAT IS HAPPENING

If your child finds it hard to talk about being bullied, or has communication difficulties, you could:

- **Draw pictures of your child's day,** or ask them to draw what has happened during their day. You could draw pictures of them at break, at lunchtime, in the classroom, moving about the school, and what games they played.
- **Use toys or puppets to encourage your child to talk.** You could use them to tell a story of a child being bullied and show how important it is to tell someone. Your child may feel more comfortable telling a toy or puppet what is happening.
- **Use a diary system or a worry box** where your child can draw pictures, or write words. You can then agree a time to talk about it later.
- **Use scales to rate how your child is feeling at different times during their day.** Use numbers or traffic light symbols, where the different numbers, or colours, mean different feelings. If you use a traffic light system, use green for feeling good, orange for okay and red for upset.
- **Use pictures of faces showing different expressions to explain feelings.** Draw pictures of happy, sad, angry, crying faces and ask your child to choose one to match how they feel.
- **Use visual prompts like pictures in books,** communication boards (visual symbols organised by topic) and cue cards (that contain a message in a picture or written format).

The **National Autistic Society** has information about different communication tools and resources you can use: **www.autism.org.uk**

STRATEGIES TO HELP

Disabled children may experience bullying in different ways and have different needs. A range of responses are needed, there is no 'one size fits all' approach. Some children, due to the nature of their disability, might not be able to understand the process or the ideas behind some ways to help deal with bullying.

But there are ways to help support your child – for example by developing their confidence. Parents we talked to also described different forms of support that the school had put in place to help their child.

Suggestions parents made include:

- **Draw pictures of the bullying and ways your child could deal with it.** You could draw a cartoon strip which shows your child walking away from the bullying or telling someone.
- **Use 'social stories' to help your child understand what bullying is and learn skills to deal with what's happening.** Social stories describe a situation and focus on a few key points, such as what will happen and how people might react. They aim to increase a child's understanding and make them more comfortable in different situations. You can use social stories to explain times and places where bullying might happen, like break times, on school transport, or lunch times.
- **Give your child the opportunity to tell you how they feel.** Agree together a time or place to do this, if you can.
- **Draw a map of the school and ask your child to colour in different areas to show how safe they feel.** For example, green for safe for the classroom, the toilets might be red for danger, or orange for the less visible parts of the playground.

- **Practice responses your child can use if they're bullied,** like saying NO, walking away confidently or telling someone. Agree who this will be together.
- **Work with your child to develop their social skills,** reading facial expressions and body language, listening skills and recognising tone of voice.
- **Talk as a family about bullying and how you can support each other.**

Support for your child may be available by phone, online and through support groups. See the organisations listed on page 17 and call our freephone helpline for more information.

The National Autistic Society has information about social stories and communication tools and resources you can use: **www.autism.org.uk**

LET YOUR CHILD KNOW:

- ***they are loved***
- ***it is OK to be different***
- ***they have the right to be happy and safe***
- ***that no matter what happens you still care for them***
- ***that you believe what they tell you.***

TIPS FOR BUILDING CONFIDENCE & SELF-ESTEEM

Emphasise your child's strengths, being specific where possible. Help them to understand their strengths. When your child feels a sense of accomplishment and pride in their ability to do something, they will have more confidence to persevere when they face challenges.

- **Give your child a chance to contribute** – to a conversation, to family chores, or to planning a fun family activity. This communicates your faith in their abilities and helps to give them a sense of responsibility.
- **Make sure your child has time to look after themselves** (for example, eating, sleeping, exercise, relaxing).
- **Put a picture of your child with family members on a wall in their room,** to remind them that they are part of a family.
- **Tell them you have confidence in them.** For example, "tying laces is hard, but I know you'll get there in the end".
- **Spend time with them** and take time to listen.
- **Work on social and communication skills** – how to take turns, how to introduce themselves. You can do this through play and in day-to-day family life.
- **Reassure your child that you love them** and being bullied is not their fault.
- **Help them to make friends;** invite other children into your home.
- **Talk about what a good friend is** – a good friend is kind, shares and listens, not someone who hurts others or makes them sad.
- **Encourage your child to be a good friend too.**
- **Treat your child's mistakes as learning experiences**
- **Encourage your child to solve problems** and make their own decisions.

USEFUL CONTACTS

Anti-Bullying Alliance

Resources and information for parents and schools to help address bullying of children with special educational needs and disabilities. Good practice guidance for teachers and other professionals on cyberbullying, bullying and mental health and bullying and autistic spectrum disorders.
www.anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk

Bullying UK

Information and practical advice for parents, young people and professionals. Free online parenting classes to help manage behaviour.
Helpline 0808 800 2222
www.bullying.co.uk

Changing Faces

Supports people who have conditions or injuries which affect their appearance. Self-help guides for children and young people on looking different, feeling different, when teasing becomes bullying – with techniques to handle different situations.
Support Line 0300 012 0275
www.changingfaces.org.uk

Kidscape

Advice line for parents and anti-bullying workshops (in London) for children aged 9-16 who are being bullied, including body language, confidence building and verbal assertiveness techniques.
Advice Line 020 7823 5430
www.kidscape.org.uk

Childline

Tips for children on building confidence and self-esteem, being scared to go to school. How a child can respond if they're being bullied and how to support a friend who's being bullied. Children can call a counsellor or chat to one online in confidence. They also have videos about bullying and other topics in BSL.
Helpline 0800 1111 (24 hours)
www.childline.org.uk

Respectme Scotland

Works with adults involved in the lives of children and young people to give them the practical skills and confidence to deal with children who are bullied and those who bully others.
0844 800 8600
www.respectme.org.uk



AT SCHOOL

HOW SCHOOLS HELP CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

Most children with special educational needs (SEN) will go to mainstream schools. Some children with more complex needs will go to special schools. In mainstream schools in England and Wales there will be a Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO). They are responsible for arranging and coordinating the extra support for a child with special educational needs.

In England, each school is required to provide an SEN Information Report in addition to their inclusion policy and accessibility plans required under the Equality Act 2010. It must include information on how they identify and assess children with SEN, the support provided for emotional and social development and what they do to prevent bullying.

Mainstream schools must still follow a 'graduated' approach to meeting a child's special educational needs. This means that increasing levels of support should be given when your child is not making progress towards their agreed outcomes or they continue to work at lower levels than other children.

In England, the help is called SEN support. In Scotland, the help is called Additional Support, in Wales, School Action and School Action Plus and in Northern Ireland, Stages 1 and 2 of Additional Support.

Need advice about your child's education? We have lots of information on our website, or you can contact our free helpline and speak to our Education Advice Service: **0808 808 3555** or **helpline@contact.org.uk**

CHILDREN WITH STATEMENTS, EDUCATION, HEALTH & CARE PLANS, & COORDINATED SUPPORT PLANS

If your child has a statement, Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan (or CSP in Scotland), the support they receive, including strategies and support around bullying, should be written down here.

GOVERNMENT ANTI-BULLYING GUIDANCE

There are a number of key documents produced by the devolved governments that you may find useful, especially if your child's school is struggling to resolve the bullying. They outline the legal duties and powers schools have to tackle bullying of children with special educational needs and disabilities.

England – Preventing and tackling bullying: advice for head teachers, staff and governing bodies (July 2017), Department for Education: **www.gov.uk**

Wales – Respecting others: anti-bullying guidance circulars, Welsh Assembly: **www.wales.gov.uk**

Scotland – A national approach to anti-bullying for Scotland's children and young people (October 2018): **www.gov.scot.uk**

Northern Ireland – Pastoral care in schools: promoting positive behaviour (June 2001) – Dept. for Education: **www.deni.gov.uk**

BULLYING AT SCHOOL

It can be hard for you to approach the school about bullying, but it's important to let the school know your concerns straight away. Schools have a duty of care towards their pupils. This means that a school must look after the safety and wellbeing of their pupils as a reasonable parent would.

BEHAVIOUR AND DISCIPLINE IN SCHOOLS

UK schools, including academies and free schools, don't have to have an anti-bullying policy by law (although a lot do). But they do have to have a behaviour policy which outlines measures to encourage good behaviour in schools, particularly preventing all forms of bullying among pupils. These should be published on the school's website, or ask the school for a copy.

When a school is developing their behaviour policy, government advice states that the policy should be clear and well understood by staff, parents and pupils. It should also acknowledge the school's legal duties under the Equality Act 2010. Schools have a duty to provide reasonable adjustments for disabled pupils and must not treat disabled pupils less favourably. Private, fee-paying schools are not required to have a behaviour or anti-bullying policy, but it is good practice to do so.

IF YOUR CHILD IS BEING BULLIED BY A TEACHER OR ANOTHER MEMBER OF STAFF AT SCHOOL

If you find out your child is being bullied by an employee of the school, stay calm. Remember it's much better to try to sort the problem out diplomatically because your child is likely to have contact with them over a number of years. Keep a record of what has happened and if the problem is not resolved, write to the head teacher and make a formal complaint. See page 30.

It's best to put your concerns in writing. Some schools have communication systems or policies, such as home-to-school books or diaries. If your child's school has a system, then follow it and let the school know about your concerns. If you have previously told the school about your worries, then write to the head teacher and ask for a meeting.

We have included samples letter on pages 52 and 53 to help you.

Need advice about bullying at school? Check out our website or contact our helpline's Education Advice Service:
0808 808 3555 helpline@contact.org.uk www.contact.org.uk

"She sees a mentor at the school once a week. They work on building her self-esteem and self-worth and help with friendships. They worked on her confidence and gradually brought her out of herself, building up the confidence she lost. It's so nice to see the difference."
Parent carer

"When he was first diagnosed with ADHD, I requested a copy of the school's anti-bullying policy and discipline policy. I didn't feel I needed to refer to it but knew I had it as back up if necessary."
Parent carer

RAISING CONCERNS WITH THE SCHOOL – TIPS FROM PARENTS

- **Ask for a copy of the school's anti-bullying policy and behaviour policy.**
- **Keep a record of all the incidents.**
- **Take photos if there are any physical injuries to show the school.**
- **If your child is unable to attend school because of the stress of the bullying,** get this confirmed by your GP and let the Education Welfare Officer know about the situation.
- **Ask for the bullying to be recorded in your child's individual education plan,** statement, Education, Health and Care plan or co-ordinated support plan (Scotland), if they have one.
- **Work with the school to resolve the issue.** It may not happen immediately, but do keep meeting and working with them.
- **If the bullying continues, you may want to make a complaint.** Follow the school's complaints procedure (see page 30).
- **Get advice about disability discrimination** and the disability equality duty (see page 50).

> *"I wrote my concerns in his communication book and the teachers looked for any incidents."*
> **Parent carer**

WHAT THE SCHOOL CAN DO

There are a number of methods used by schools to deal with bullying. Some of these are listed below. Not all schools will use them, some use a combination and others have policies that just focus on behaviour. Ask the school for their behaviour and discipline policy to see what they do.

- **Circle of Friends** was developed to promote the inclusion of students with disabilities and difficulties into mainstream school. It's a programme involving pupils, teachers and parents.
- **Telling schools** – if the child being bullied is unable to or too scared to tell a teacher, all other children know it is their duty to report it.
- **Peer support programmes** – everyone in the school knows bullying is not acceptable and older pupils volunteer and are trained to care for younger pupils. These volunteer pupils are identified by a badge or ribbon.
- **No blame support groups** – bullies are not blamed and are encouraged to work in a group together with a teacher to suggest a solution.
- **Whole school individual approach** uses mentoring in addition to circle time, restorative justice and quiet clubs.
- **Group and individual sessions** based on listening and behavioural therapy, looking at anger management, social skills and resilience, emotional issues and relaxation.
- **Provide training and resources** that encourage staff and children to think of ways to make their school more inclusive, helping them to challenge bullying in their school.
- **Develop projects that provide opportunities for disabled and non disabled children to spend time together**, looking to bust the myths and change views and attitudes.



Changing Faces has information about developing social skills, see page 17.
The National Autistic Society has information about Circles of Friends at **www.autism.org.uk**

MEETING WITH SOMEONE AT THE SCHOOL

If you are worried about meeting with the school, take someone with you. You could take a friend or relative, or someone from a local organisation or national support group may able to go with you. You can ask them to take notes, so that you are clear on what was agreed, the action the school will take and how they will keep you updated.

These people may also be able to help:

England – Information, Advice and Support Services Network (IASS Network)

IAS Services provide information, advice and support to children and young people with SEN and disabilities and their parents. There should be an IAS Service in every local authority. Find yours at:
www.councilfordisabledchildren.org.uk

Wales – Parent Partnership Services

Parent Partnership Services offer information, advice and support for parents/carers of children and young people with special educational needs. You can find details on your local council website.

Scotland and Northern Ireland

Look on your local council website to find a local advocacy service who may be able to help. Or call our free helpline to find one in your area.

Even after you meet with the school, the bullying may not stop immediately and some actions may take longer to put in place. You may need to have several meetings to fully resolve the bullying and make sure a range of support is put in place for your child.

SUGGESTIONS FOR WHAT THE SCHOOL CAN DO

FROM PARENTS, CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE

- **Have a named person your child can tell about the bullying.** This could be their teacher, support worker or special educational needs coordinator (SENCO). Make sure your child knows where they are based in the school and how they can find them.
- **Have a quiet room your child can go to sometimes.** Make sure the lunchtime supervisors are aware of this.
- **Create a sign or signal your child can use** at school to communicate with staff if they need to leave the room.
- **Be responsible for the behaviour of pupils beyond the school gate,** especially on school transport – behaviour outside of school can be included in the school behaviour policy.
- **Provide training for school and local authority staff** in special educational needs and disabilities.
- **Be aware of unstructured times, like lunchtime, breaks and moving around the school.** These times aren't always covered in statements, EHC plans or co-ordinated support plans, yet support is often needed during them.
- **Don't remove the child who is being bullied from the situation** – remove the child who is exhibiting bullying behaviour instead.
- **Improve communication between teaching staff and lunchtime supervisors** so they're aware of what could be happening in the playground and classrooms.
- **Allow children the opportunity to stay indoors at lunch and break times,** for example, by setting up lunchtime clubs and activities.

- **Provide support at times of transition,** like moving from primary to secondary school and moving from a special school or unit to a mainstream school.
- **Be flexible and use different anti-bullying strategies** – not just one approach.
- **Review the anti-bullying policy regularly** and involve parents and pupils, including disabled children and parents of disabled children, in the reviews.
- **Work with your child on social skills** like practising letting other people speak first, listening to other people's opinions without reacting aggressively, and understanding body language.
- **Give praise and encouragement to children affected by bullying.**

> *"I felt anxious that the bullying was continuing even after it was resolved. I was worried if it was still continuing, is he being left out, is he interacting with other children? I spoke to the school about this and they let me come in at lunchtime and discreetly watch my son in the playground, so I could see him playing with others."*
>
> **Parent carer**

A PARENT'S STORY

"My son, Jacob, was being picked on by another boy. Jacob has a learning disability. He was being picked on by a boy who also has special needs but he is higher functioning than Jacob. He was upset, saying he never wanted to go to school again and was finding it difficult to go to sleep at night. It was very difficult to get him out of the home in the morning.

However, the teaching staff were absolutely brilliant about it, I wrote my concerns in his communication book and the teachers looked out for any incidents and noticed this boy tripping him up. They spoke to this boy about his behaviour and how he should behave.

They also spoke to Jacob about the incident and reassured him to go to them for help in the future over subsequent issues and, to me, the most useful thing they did over the next couple of weeks was to ensure that his self-esteem was not damaged in any way, they made sure they praised him for all the good things he did and the communication between home and school was brilliant over this time so that we could also praise him and up his self-esteem and confidence.

Jacob is now very happy and settled at school again and I commend the actions taken by his school.

We need to ensure that bullying issues are not just about anti-bullying and disability awareness. We need to ensure that children and young people with additional needs are helped to be resilient individuals, skills which will prepare them for adulthood, as well as keeping them as confident and secure as possible within their childhood."

It can be very difficult letting your child go to school after you find out they're being bullied. If you can, talk to your child and agree a way forward together.



MAKING A COMPLAINT TO THE SCHOOL

Many of the parents we spoke to had positive responses from schools and found that the bullying stopped. Unfortunately, some parents don't have such a positive response from the school and have to take further action. If you are not satisfied with the school's response you can make a formal complaint.

MAKING A FORMAL COMPLAINT

All schools must have a complaints policy. This may be available on the school website, or ask the school for a copy.

Make your complaint in writing and state clearly that you are making a formal complaint. Depending on the school's complaints procedure you may need to address it to the head teacher or chair of governors. However, it is a good idea to send the letter to the chair of governors anyway. Keep a copy of the letter for your records.

GETTING A RESPONSE TO YOUR COMPLAINT

Each school has its own complaints procedure, so the response of the governors will vary. However, there are some common elements. There is usually a timescale by which you can expect to receive a response to your complaint.

The governors will often appoint a sub-committee to hear your complaint and decide what action should be taken. In most cases, you can attend the sub-committee and take someone with you for support. The head teacher or another teacher will also attend and present their case.

In other situations, school governors will only accept 'paper submissions', meaning written complaints.

For details of local organisations that can help you make a complaint look on your local council webiste, or contact our freephone helpline:
0808 808 3555 helpline@contact.org.uk www.contact.org.uk

There is a template letter on page 53 you can adapt to help you complain to the school

"The most useful thing the school did over the next couple of weeks after the bullying was reported, was to ensure that his self-esteem was not damaged in any way. They praised him for all the good things he did."
Parent carer

"I emailed the head and asked for a meeting. The school addressed the issues immediately – we were very lucky and had a good outcome"
Parent carer

IF YOU'RE UNHAPPY WITH THE SCHOOL'S RESPONSE

ENGLAND

In England, some local authorities may have a role in reviewing complaints in their schools and may have specialist staff such as anti-bullying coordinators or inclusion coordinators who may be able to help and support you. Check the school complaints policy to see if the local authority has a role in reviewing complaints.

The Department for Education can review complaints about local authority schools in England when you have been through the internal complaints procedure. In England, you can make a complaint by completing the online complaint form at:
www.gov.uk/complain-about-school

Academies, free schools and complaining to the Education Funding Agency (EFA)

The Education Funding Agency can review complaints about academies and free schools. They cannot overturn a school's decision but they can look at whether the complaint was properly dealt with and check that the complaints procedure meets legal requirements.

WALES

If you are not happy with the outcome of a complaint to the governing body, you may be able to raise it with the local authority (LA). However, the LA won't interfere with a governing body's decision unless the school failed to act properly to investigate your complaint and take steps to resolve it. An LA can't investigate because you are unhappy with the governing body's decision.

OFSTED/Estyn (England and Wales)

Although Ofsted and Estyn don't investigate individual cases, they have the power to investigate the quality of education your child receives or poor management of the school. If they receive a number of complaints about a school, this can trigger an inspection. They can work with the school to improve them, and monitor their progress.

Ofsted: www.ofsted.gov.uk

Estyn: www.estyn.gov.uk

NORTHERN IRELAND

If you're not happy with the outcome of a complaint to the school, you may be able complain to the Education and Library Board or Council for Catholic Maintained Schools in certain circumstances.

Education Authority Northern Ireland

Government website with information for parents, students and teachers about bullying and other issues, including how to make a complaint.

www.eani.org.uk

Children's Law Centre NI

Helps children, young people, their parents and professionals with legal queries about school, access to services for disabled children, special educational needs, mental health service provision, family law issues or general legal queries.
Also provide free legal representation if you are unhappy with a decision about your child's education and are appealing to the Special Educational Needs and Disability Tribunal.

Free Advice for Children and Young People

0808 808 5678 www.childrenslawcentre.org

SCOTLAND

If the school hasn't addressed your complaint you can complain to the Education Authority. You can get free legal advice to help you do this.

Scottish Child Law Centre

Free legal advice and information through advice line, email and website to help children and young people, their families and carers, and professionals working with them.

0131 667 6333
Freecall Under 21s (landlines) 0800 328 8970 (mobiles) 0300 330 1421
www.sclc.org.uk

Coram Children's Legal Centre

National charity committed to promoting children's rights in the UK. It provides free legal advice and information on all aspects of family, child and education law affecting children and families. Advice and representation to children and young people, parents and carers about education issues, if you are eligible for legal aid.

Child Law Advice Line 0300 330 5480 (for residents of England)
Civil Legal Advice Education Law Line 0345 345 4345
(for those eligible for legal aid)
www.childrenslegalcentre.com

TAKING THINGS FURTHER

LEGAL ACTION

You may consider taking legal action against the school for not protecting your child from bullying, but legal action should be seen as the last resort. There is little chance of success unless you have plenty of evidence that bullying has caused physical or mental harm. This will need to be supported by reports from medical professionals and the school. If you are thinking of taking legal action, seek specialist advice first. Legal action can be a costly and lengthy process and getting legal funding is very difficult.

KEEPING YOUR CHILD OFF SCHOOL

If the bullying continues, you may feel unable to send your child back to school, but if you don't, you may risk a fine or court action if you keep them at home. If your child is too anxious to attend school, see your GP and contact our freephone helpline for advice.

MOVING SCHOOLS

Because of the bullying you may decide that you have no option but find another school for your child.

Finding a place at a different school may not be easy, particularly if the school you prefer is full and you need to appeal for a school place.

In England if your child has a statement of special educational needs, Education, Health and Care plan or in Scotland, a co-ordinated support plan, you will need to contact your local authority and ask for a review or change of school placement.

See page 33 for organisations that can give you free legal advice.
Some types of bullying are against the law – see page 44.

HOME SCHOOLING

If the bullying is not being dealt with, you may feel that you have no choice but to remove your child from school. This may be for a short period while you wait for a school place, or a longer term arrangement. As a parent, you have the right to home educate your child. You do not have to follow a set curriculum but you must provide education that is suitable to the age, ability and aptitude of your child and to any special educational needs they may have.

If your child has a statement, Education, Health and Care plan or coordinated support plan in Scotland, call our freephone helpline for further advice before withdrawing your child from school.

ALTERNATIVE PROVISION

Alternative provision is education arranged by local authorities for pupils who, because of exclusion, illness or other reasons, would not otherwise receive suitable education. In some areas, local authorities may agree that your child can attend specialist alternative provision for children who have experienced bullying. This can be for a period of time, giving support to your child to enable them to return to a school once they feel able to do so.

If you are considering moving schools, keeping your child out of school or home schooling, our website has information about your rights, or you can call our free helpline and speak to our Education Advice Service:
0808 808 3555 helpline@contact.org.uk www.contact.org.uk



"Moving schools isn't for everyone, but if you're thinking about it go and look at the new schools, see what you think. It may work."

Parent carer

BULLYING OUTSIDE SCHOOL

Bullying doesn't just take place in schools, it can happen anywhere. If people are bullying your child in the community, by mobile phone text or online (known as 'cyberbullying'), let the school know what is happening. Schools have a legal duty to safeguard and protect pupils and manage their behaviour both on and off the school premises.

Some types of bullying behaviour are against the law. You can report them to a third party website or the police, see page 44.

BULLYING IN THE NEIGHBOURHOOD

Some families experience bullying and intimidation in their neighbourhood and community. Remember, you don't have to deal with it on your own, and there are things you can do.

COUNCIL OR HOUSING ASSOCIATION HELP

If you live in a council or housing association home, tell them what is happening. You may be asked to keep a diary of the incidents as evidence. Councils and housing associations can take action against tenants who harass or intimidate other tenants, or you could seek advice about rehousing.

ON THE WAY TO SCHOOL

If your child is being bullied on the way to or home from school, let the school know what is happening. Schools can take steps to deal with behaviour on school transport, or on the way to and from school. See 'Bullying at school' on page 21.

AT LEISURE FACILITIES AND CLUBS

It is not a legal requirement for clubs or services to have an anti-bullying policy. It is, however, good practice to have one. Ask the club or service if they have an anti-bullying or inclusion policy. You may also want to talk to the person organising the club to make them aware of any bullying and ask what action they can take. You can also make a complaint. Some types of bullying behaviour are against the law. You can report them to a third party website or the police – see page 44.

> *"We've moved away from the area now and it's much better. When we moved, I made sure that everyone knew of her disability and if they had a problem with her to come to me. Someone called her stupid recently and she went mad but I sorted it straight away."*
>
> **Parent carer**

> *"Don't assume your child is going to be bullied but be prepared in case they are."*
>
> **Parent carer**

BULLYING ONLINE, ON MOBILES AND GAMING

Technology can be fun, educational and a means to socialise, but can also be used to bully people. As more young people have mobile phones and access to the internet, cyberbullying is increasing.

WHAT MAKES CYBERBULLYING DIFFERENT FROM OTHER TYPES OF BULLYING?

Cyberbullying is a form of bullying that can happen 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Cyberbullying is often done anonymously. Bullies can set up fake accounts and hide their real identities.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Cyberbullying is not something a child can be easily advised to 'just walk away' from. Ask your child questions and try to find out who is bullying them. If at least one of the bullies is a child at their school, tell the head teacher. Schools can take steps to deal with behaviour off the school premises. See 'Bullying at school' on page 21.

You could start by asking your child to give you tips on how to stay safe online. For example, you could ask them if they know how to block senders of nasty texts, change their account settings to 'private', withhold personal details, and report online abuse to social media sites.

Cyberbullying can be very serious and can amount to a criminal offence under a range of different laws. Supervise your children and make sure they are aware of advice on respecting others and staying safe on the internet. Ask your child to let you know if someone or something is worrying them, or makes them feel uncomfortable.



Make sure your child knows not to respond or return messages but do keep copies of emails, texts and posts on social networking sites, as this may be useful evidence. If your child or you can make a note of the dates and times of bullying messages, along with any details about the sender's internet details, this will help to identify them.

TIPS TO STOP CYBERBULLYING

1 Identify the bully or bullies if you can.

2 Stop responding to their messages or posts.

3 Save the evidence.

4 Block the bully.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Department for Education

Has advice for teachers and and school staff, and for parents and carers on cyberbullying.
www.gov.uk

Childnet International

Information for parents, children and young people about staying safe online, translated into Arabic, Bengali, Hindi, Polish, Punjabi, Somali, Spanish, Turkish, Urdu, Vietnamese and Welsh.
020 7639 6967 **www.childnet.com**

Thinkuknow

Interactive advice on staying safe for children aged 5-14+ across all social media, chat rooms, gaming and telephone networks. Parents' section includes: what is my child doing online? Talking to your child about webcams, how to respond to and report any abuse. Practical tips and simple guidance with information in English and Welsh.
0370 496 7622 **www.thinkuknow.co.uk**

Childline

Advice for children on tackling cyberbullying across all social networks and staying safe online, including how to report bullies. Children can call them in confidence or chat online to a counseller. Videos about a range of topics, including bullying and cyberbullying in British Sign Language.
Freephone 0800 111 **www.childline.org.uk**



WHEN BULLYING BECOMES A HATE CRIME

Any crime, such as stealing, destroying possessions, or harassment, can be a disability hate crime if it is done because of a person's disability. Using mobile phones and social media and internet sites to bully people may also break several laws.

If your child experiences a hate crime you can tell the school. The school can take steps to deal with behaviour on and off school premises. In some schools, students can report bullying or hate crime on the school's website. You can ask the school to report it to the police on your behalf, report it yourself or use a third party.

THIRD-PARTY REPORTING

Third-party reporting is a way of telling someone what has happened. The third-party reporting organisation then tells the police for you and does not have to pass on your personal details.

Stop Hate Crime UK

24 hour independent and confidential Hate Crime reporting services. Stop Learning Disability Hate Crime is support for people affected by learning disability hate crime, as a victim, witness or third party in certain areas – check website. You can report hate crime on their website or by phone. Information in community languages, easy-read and online British Sign Language interpreting service.
24-hour helpline 0800 138 1615
www.stophateuk.org

Scotland

A list of local third-party reporting centres can be found at:
www.scotland.police.uk

CONTACTING THE POLICE

You can report bullying and hate crime to the police. If the bully is a child over 10 years old, they are over the age of criminal responsibility so there may be action the police can take. Do not dial 999 unless your child is in immediate danger. Use the non-emergency number, 101.

You could also seek legal advice about how the law can protect your child or young person, see page 32 or call our freephone helpline.

LOCAL SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN BOARDS

Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCBs) exist in England and Wales to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in their area. If your child is at significant risk of harm the LSCBs should bring together all the local agencies, for example the school, social services, police and NHS, to work together to protect them from harm. Find contact details on your local authority website.



IF YOUR CHILD EXHIBITS BULLYING BEHAVIOUR

There are many reasons why children may get involved in bullying. One of the most common reasons is because they've been bullied themselves. They may be taking out their insecurities on others, copying behaviour they don't fully understand, or acting out because they want attention. They may have low self esteem. The tips throughout this guide may help.

Sometimes a child may show signs of bullying behaviour because of their condition. They may have a high pain threshold and so play roughly, or copy other children's behaviour, crave sensory input in different ways or they may have behavioural difficulties. Your child could also be angry, bully as a reaction to being bullied themselves, or because they are lonely and think it will make them more popular with their peers.

It is important to get support and practice more appropriate responses with your child. Find ways to build up their self-esteem and help them to feel valued.

Sometimes a child may react violently to prolonged bullying and risk being punished by the school. Schools must take account of a child's disability when applying the school's behaviour policy. This can mean the school takes different action or makes reasonable adjustments when dealing with your child's behaviour.

If your child has a statement, Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan (or CSP in Scotland), the support they receive may need an urgent review, to include strategies and support to help manage their behaviour.

THE SCHOOL'S RESPONSE

If your child behaves or reacts in any ways like the examples mentioned above, the school may use sanctions to respond to the behaviour. Guidance on school discipline and pupil behaviour policies advise schools to take account of a child's disability when applying the school's behaviour policy. This may mean the school takes different action or makes reasonable adjustments when applying the policy.

For tips on building self-esteem and confidence see page 16.
If your child has any communication difficulties, see page 13.

Our free guide ***Understanding your child's behaviour*** is available to download or from our helpline: **0808 808 3555** **helpline@contact.org.uk**

> *"I got a call from the head. Other parents had complained that he had threatened their children. The head tried to explain to them that he was autistic but the parents said that their children were no longer allowed to play with him in case he threatened them again."*
> Parent carer

IF YOUR CHILD REACTS VIOLENTLY TO BEING BULLIED

- **Talk to your child about what has happened**, why they behaved as they did and what they could do instead.
- **Reassure them that you love them** but don't like their behaviour.
- **Talk about different ways they can respond** to bullying.
- **Draw pictures of the bullying and the different ways your child could deal with it.** For example, you could draw cartoon strips which show your child hitting back, or walking away from the bullying, or telling someone. Then talk about the different responses – what might not work and which is best for your child.
- **Explore what could be reasonable responses** to different levels of bullying, from teasing to more serious bullying.
- **Establish a safe place where they can go** if they're being bullied.
- **Make the school aware of the bullying** and tell them how it is affecting your child.
- **Encourage them to use other ways to let go of their frustrations.**
- **Work on building their self-confidence and self-esteem** – praise and encourage them whenever appropriate.
- **Create a sign or signal they can use** to show staff at school if the situation becomes too much and they need to leave the room.

IF YOUR CHILD BULLIES OTHER CHILDREN

There are many reasons why children may get involved in bullying. One of the most common reasons is because they've been bullied themselves. They may be taking out their insecurities on others, copying behaviour they don't fully understand, or acting out because they want attention. They may have low self esteem. The tips throughout this guide may help.

Bullying UK has information and videos that may be helpful if your child has been exhibiting bullying behaviour: **www.bullying.co.uk**
The National Autistic Society has information about social stories and comic strip conversations, including guidelines to writing your own: **www.nas.org.uk**



DISABILITY AND EQUALITY IN SCHOOLS

The Equality Act 2010 (England, Scotland and Wales), made it unlawful to discriminate against disabled pupils and prospective pupils in all aspects of school life. This means that schools can't treat a disabled person less favourably than others for a reason which relates to their disability.

Under the Act, disabled children have the right not to be discriminated against. Schools also have a legal duty to take reasonable steps to avoid disadvantage for disabled children. If you feel that your child has experienced discrimination, you can complain to the governors of the school. If you are not satisfied, you may be able to make a claim for disability discrimination.

For information, advice and support on disability discrimination and human rights issues for individuals see these organisations:

Equality Advisory and Support Service – England, Scotland and Wales

Helpline 0808 800 0082
www.equalityadvisoryservice.com

Equality and Human Rights Commission – England, Scotland and Wales

www.equalityhumanrights.com

Equality Commission for Northern Ireland

028 90 500 600
www.equalityni.org



SAMPLE LETTER TO SEND TO THE SCHOOL IF YOUR CHILD IS BEING BULLIED

Download a Word version at **www.contact.org.uk/sampleletterforschool**

Date

Dear (name of teacher or head teacher)

I believe my son/daughter is being bullied. This is upsetting her/him very much.

I would very much like to meet you to discuss what the school can do to stop the bullying.

(If you have spoken to the school before) I have spoken to the school about my child being bullied (give name of person you spoke to and dates) but no action has been taken/the bullying has not stopped/the bullying is getting worse. (Use any of these points or add your own.)

Please find attached a report of the bullying giving the details of what has happened.

I understand that the school has a duty of care towards my child and feel that the school is not following the law and/or guidance. To stop the bullying, I feel the school could... (see 'What the school can do' on page 19 of this guide).

I would like a copy of my child's school record. Please pass on this request to the chair of governors.

I would also like copies of the school's behaviour, anti-bullying and special educational needs policy.

(If the school is not doing what it must or should do, give details.)

I am available for a meeting on (give dates).

I would like to bring a friend or adviser with me (give name).

Yours sincerely,

(Your name)

SAMPLE LETTER TO RAISE A FORMAL COMPLAINT

Download a Word version at **www.contact.org.uk/sampleletterforcomplaint**

Date

Dear (name of teacher or head/chair of governors/depending on the school complaints procedure, you may wish to copy your complaint to local authority).

I believe my son/daughter is still being bullied. My child is... (describe your child in a few lines – have they changed? If so, start with how they were before the bullying and now).

Bullying to date... (add information or attach bullying log)

I know there are patterns to the bullying... (describe the patterns).

If this does not stop, I believe that... (add your thoughts about the effects and what might happen. If you have sought help from a professional such as a GP or CAMHS, include any relevant reports).

I have spoken to the head/school about my child being bullied (give name of person you spoke to and dates) but no action has been taken/ the bullying has not stopped/the bullying is getting worse. (delete as appropriate or add your own points.)

I would very much like meet with you to discuss my complaint and what the school can do to stop the bullying.

I understand that the school has a duty of care towards my child and do not feel that it is following the law and/or guidance. To stop the bullying, I feel the school could... (see ‘ What the school can do’ on page 19 of this guide).

(If the school is not doing what it must or should do, give details here.)

I am available for a meeting on (give dates).

I would like to bring a friend or adviser with me (give name).

Yours sincerely,

(Your name)

BULLYING DIARY FOR PARENTS

Download a Word version at **www.contact.org.uk/bullyingdiary**

Date and time						
Where did it happen?						
Description of incident: • what happened? • who did it? • who saw it?						
How was your child affected at the time, and were there any later effects (injuries – are there photos?)						
Did you tell the school?						
If you told the school, what did the school do?						
Have things got better, stayed the same, or got worse for your child?						

OTHER USEFUL INFORMATION

Mencap Direct

For people with a learning disability and their parents and carers. Has easy-read guides and videos for young people about what to if they're being bullied, how to prevent being bullied, how to help others and cyberbullying.
Helpline 0808 808 1111
www.mencap.org.uk

National Network of Parent Carer Forums (NNPCF)

Parent carer forums aim to improve local services for disabled children and their families in England by supporting and developing parent participation. Call our freephone helpline on 0808 808 3555 to find out if there is a forum in your area.
www.nnpcf.org.uk

> *"Prepare your child for school. If you're worried that they're going to be a target for bullies think, 'How do I prepare them for this?' Build their self confidence and self esteem."*
> **Parent carer**

GET IN CONTACT

Contact's Freephone helpline advisers can help you with any question you have about life with a disabled child – from getting a diagnosis for you child, the services and benefits you might be entitled to, to help in the early years for new parents and support when your child is at school or college. We can also put you in touch with support groups in your area.

0808 808 3555

info@contact.org.uk

www.contact.org.uk

twitter.com/contactfamilies

facebook.com/contactfamilies

youtube.com/contactfamilies

Contact Head Office
209–211 City Road
London EC1V 1JN



We are Contact, the charity for families with disabled children.

We understand that life with a disabled child brings unique challenges, and we exist to help families feel valued, supported, confident and informed.

We support families with the best possible guidance and information. We bring families together to support each other.

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