

# What can you do to protect your child from **BULLYING?**

No parent can bear the thought that their child is being bullied – the human instinct to protect their young is strong.

So what would you do if you thought somebody at school was intimidating your child, hurting them or humiliating them?

And what would you expect the school to do?

Child Magazine asked local headteacher Chris Ludford-Thomas.

## **What is bullying?**

The word bully is often used liberally to describe behaviour that is unkind, rough, or inconsiderate. But it may not be bullying.

Bullying is when a person feels uncomfortable and intimidated by somebody else's behaviour, and it is repeated and goes on over time.

Bullying is when it is deliberate and not accidental, and when somebody is controlling the situation leaving the victim feeling helpless to do anything about it, either because they are bigger, stronger, have more friends, or have something the other person wants.

It doesn't have to be physical. It can be silence or being excluded. It can be name calling, anonymous notes and texts, leaving people out, putting people down, rumour spreading, or deliberately embarrassing or humiliating others.

## **What is not bullying?**

Five or six year old little boys push each other about and it's like puppies playing – testing out their limits. With most, there's no intent to hurt other children.

Parents may see bruises and ask what has happened? Their child tells their mum they were pushed over. It may have happened in every day play.

All children are learning to interact as social human beings and school is a mini world where children are practising their skills. If it is not deliberate and repeated, it is not bullying.



### How do boys and girls differ?

Bullying among girls tend to be more manipulative and it's much more difficult to detect. It often stems from friendship issues. Girls want to be 'in the club' - boys want to too, but are happy to go it alone.

It's the worst possible thing for the girl to be excluded - boys move on, find someone else to kick a football around with.

### How do you know if your child is being bullied?

Look out for the emotional welfare of your child. There may be a change in their

attitude to school or they may be unusually upset by things. They may be withdrawn.

Children may come home with bruises, or they may come home with belongings or money missing.

It may be that the child has stopped talking about school or may not want you going into school.

### What should parents do?

It's important to try and find out what's going on without intimidating the child/children. Try and talk to your child about school and friendships.

Approach it calmly.

If your child tells you that they are unhappy because someone is unkind to them or bullying them, listen carefully and take it seriously. Make sure they understand that you care how they feel.

Make an appointment to go into the school and discuss your concerns with their teacher or headteacher.

Do not go to the parent of the child you believe to be carrying out the bullying.

If it is happening at school then the school needs to sort it out.

### What will the school do?

The school should:-

Listen and not be dismissive of parents who voice concerns over bullying.

Take your concerns seriously

Investigate any incidents or situation

Talk to the children

Report back to parents on their findings and any action they are taking

If necessary get parents, teachers and children together and talk through it

Keep channels of communication between teachers and parents open, as the more information there is available to both sides, the quicker the situation can be resolved.

### What if I'm not happy with what the school does?

As a parent you have to invest trust in the school when situations like this arise.

Listen to what the school is telling you. Don't jump on the defensive – try and stay calm and logical.

Go to the school and see for yourself how your child is at school.

If you are really not happy with the action that the school is taking, or with their attitude to your concerns, you can go through the school's complaints procedure to the governing body, and also the local education authority.

### Should I consider moving my child to another school?

Moving schools is an option but it should be the last resort.

You need to resolve issues and running away from them may not resolve them.

If you do not resolve what is causing the bullying then it may occur in the new school also.

### What if my child is the bully?

Don't get defensive of your child. Take the matter seriously.

Talk to your child about school and friendships. Be prepared to meet with teachers or the head and support your child. Often the bully is bullied himself or herself or they feel uncomfortable about a situation. Get to know the whole situation and try and find out why this is happening.



Chris Ludford-Thomas  
has 30 years experience  
in teaching.

## HOW YOU CAN HELP YOUR CHILD?

- Make time to talk about friendships, social life, school-work when your child is relaxed and open.
  - Don't pressurize you child to talk – let them do it in their own time and don't put words or ideas to them – let them use their own words.
  - Watch out for signs of changes in attitude to school, frequent tummy aches or sickness, unexpected or unusual anger or crying, being unusually withdrawn or other behaviour that concerns you.
  - If your child tells you that they are unhappy because someone is unkind to them or bullying them, listen carefully and take it seriously. Make sure they understand that you care how they feel.
  - Make sure you child understands that there is nothing wrong with them and that you respect them for being brave enough to tell someone.
  - Try not to suggest that your child becomes different from how they are – for example by being more assertive, or fighting back.
- They may feel that they are not good enough 'as they are' and this is not true.
- They need to know that it is the bully who needs to change their behaviour.
- Make an appointment to speak to their teacher or head-teacher – whoever you are most comfortable talking to.