

**PSHE education and bullying - helping our children feel safe to learn.
Information for parents**

Feeling physically and emotionally safe in school is essential if children are to learn and achieve. If we are scared our minds focus on the thing that is frightening us. If we are really scared our minds literally 'go blank'. We can't think about or concentrate on anything else and one of the main causes of children feeling frightened to go to school is bullying.

The fear of being bullied can be as disabling as actually being bullied.

Knowing that our children are being bullied is painful for parents and carers and can leave us feeling helpless. Advice to 'just ignore them', 'stick up for yourself' or 'hit the biggest one and they will leave you alone' are well intentioned but are at best really difficult or at worst, downright dangerous. Bullying doesn't 'toughen children up', it just damages them.

The majority of schools take great care to ensure that new pupils understand that they take bullying very seriously and will make every effort to ensure that it doesn't happen. And if bullying should occur, they will do everything they can to stop it.

Schools must have a policy for anti-bullying - ideally developed with the involvement of pupils - available for all parents. This policy should set out how bullying will be prevented and how it will be managed if it occurs.

So what is 'bullying'? Children will have rows, friends will 'fall out', have arguments or 'bust ups' and sometimes friendships end. Children may get angry with one another and occasionally this may turn into verbal rows or even physical fights.

Bullying is different. The Government describes bullying as 'behaviour by an individual or group, repeated over time, that intentionally hurts another individual or group either physically or emotionally.'

Whilst all children need to be physically safe, emotional bullying can be even more damaging than physical. The charity 'Beatbullying' has estimated 44% of suicides committed by young people are due to bullying.

Bullying can take many forms:

- Physical:** pushing, kicking, hitting or any form of physical violence.
- Emotional:** being unfriendly, leaving a child out of games or activities and tormenting.
- Verbal:** name-calling, sarcasm, spreading rumours.
- Racist:** racial taunts, graffiti, gestures.
- Religious:** taunting and tormenting.
- Sexual:** unwanted physical contact or sexually abusive comments.
- Homophobic:** because of or focusing on the issue of sexuality.
- Cyber:** malicious bullying using such channels as social networks, instant messaging and text messages.

With the development of communication technology a young person can now be bullied 24 hours a day, by a potentially huge number of people and virtually anywhere.

Clear procedures for dealing directly with incidents of bullying will be described in the school's anti-bullying policy and curriculum provision.

In primary schools this is set within work on relationships in Personal, Social, Health and Economic education (PSHE). Children learn:

- awareness of feelings and develop a vocabulary to help them share their feelings with others.
- how we show others our different feelings and how we recognise those feelings in others.
- that whilst everyone is unique and equally special we also share much in common and to challenge sayings such as 'us and them'.
- to respect others and understand they have a responsibility to protect others' bodies and feelings.
- that what we do and say has consequences and may hurt other people's bodies and feelings. Children learn to challenge sayings such as 'we were only teasing' or 'only joking'.
- what bullying is and is not; how people feel when they are bullied.
- that bullying is always unacceptable.
- how and when to be assertive and how, when, and from whom to get help.
- that if they feel they are being bullied or are frightened about bullying they have a right for it to stop; they learn who to talk to and how to explain what is happening to them.

- how their school will support them if they feel they are being bullied.

- about their responsibilities if they believe someone else is being bullied and how they can either support them directly or get help and to challenge the saying 'we don't tell tales'.

- the legal consequences of bullying others either in school or in the wider community.

As more children use mobile devices and home computers teachers will gradually extend learning to include 'cyber-bullying' as part of 'cyber safety'.

Whilst children can sometimes be thoughtless or cruel the vast majority of children are naturally kind. If a child falls over in the playground other children will naturally rush to help them. They need the skills and strategies to turn this kindness into practical caring and support for others who are being bullied. Learning these skills is at the heart of PSHE education.

Children need to gradually learn the skills and confidence required to manage the confrontation they will experience in life but this takes time. While they are developing these they need to be able to say 'please will you help me' when they are afraid; if they can't then someone else must say it for them; someone has to be willing to listen and someone has to be willing to help.

Do make sure you have a copy of the school's bullying policy. If you have any concerns about your own child or any other child that you suspect is suffering from bullying please talk to the school.