

Tackling bullying

A guide for parents and carers



Introduction

This booklet has been produced by the multi-agency Anti-Bullying Group on behalf of the Local Safeguarding Children Board of Bracknell Forest Council. The booklet aims to help parents to respond effectively to any concerns or incidences of bullying which children and young people may encounter in their school and local community.

We are committed to working with all of our schools and other agencies to tackle bullying and we have launched our 'Safer Together, Safer Wherever' Anti-Bullying Strategy and Action Plan and appointed an Anti-Bullying Co-ordinator.

The four key parts of the Action Plan are:

- Information gathering
- Prevention of bullying
- Intervention when bullying incidents occur
- Addressing bullying in the wider community

The work is supported by the Bracknell Forest Anti-Bullying Group.

The group meets regularly and is comprised of members from various agencies in Bracknell Forest.

We believe that anti-bullying measures work best when children, parents, schools and other agencies work together.

Following the successful launch of the 'Safer Together, Safer Wherever' strategy to tackle bullying and promote rights and respect, we have undertaken many anti-bullying projects in Bracknell Forest schools.

These have included: drama presentations, Peer Mentoring training, anti-bullying workshops, conferences, Rights and Respect training, and anti-bullying competitions and awards.

Many more projects and initiatives are planned as we develop this important work to keep the children and young people of Bracknell Forest safe from bullying and help them to make positive friendships.

What is bullying?

“Bullying is behaviour by an individual or group that happens repeatedly over an extended period of time that hurts another person either physically or emotionally.”

Bullying is intentional behaviour and involves an imbalance of power between the bully and the person being bullied. Bullying is not a one off incident, however unpleasant. Bullying happens persistently and may take the following forms:

Physical: Hitting, pushing, gestures, taking belongings, unwanted physical contact.

Verbal: Name calling, sarcasm and humiliation, threats, and sexual, homophobic or racist remarks.

Indirect: Being deliberately excluded or ignored, starting or spreading rumours.

Cyberbullying: This is bullying using any form of technology. This can include: sending unwanted, abusive or threatening text messages, phone calls, emails and video clips or use of the internet to degrade and humiliate. Further information is available about this.

Bullying is never a normal part of growing up, character building or something that only happens to children.

Whatever form it takes, bullying is always wrong but it can happen to anyone, both within school and outside in the wider community at anytime.

What effect does bullying have on children and young people?

The effects of bullying may differ between individuals, but it is clear that bullying can be enormously destructive behaviour that in many cases has a negative impact on a child or young person's development.

Bullying can have a damaging impact on self-esteem and confidence and can give rise to powerful and conflicting emotions. Bullied children and young people can often feel overwhelmed by feelings of fear and anger, whilst feeling powerless at the same time.

Bullying is a very serious, frightening and distressing experience for anyone to go through. In extreme cases, some children can find life so unbearable they contemplate or attempt suicide. Many more carry the effects of bullying into their adult lives and relationships.

In any situation involving bullying, it is so important that as adults, we listen to children and young people and help them to find the support that they need.



How would I know if my child is being bullied?

Sometimes a child or young person will talk to you directly about bullying or tell a friend or sibling. Quite often however children are frightened and keep bullying to themselves.

The following signs may give an indication that a child or young person is being bullied:

- Poor school attendance, lateness, refusal to attend school or truancy.
- Deterioration in schoolwork and concentration levels.
- Withdrawal from social situations; refusal to socialise.
- Avoidance of certain children or activities e.g. walking home rather than using the bus.
- Harsh self-criticism; holding persistent negative views of themselves e.g. 'ugly' 'stupid' 'failure.'
- Personality change; moodiness, depression, suicidal thoughts, or aggression.
- Sleeping difficulties; bedwetting, headaches, stomach aches, lack of appetite, torn clothes, unexplained cuts or bruises, missing possessions or lost money.
- Attempts to change their appearance e.g. refusal to wear glasses or certain items of clothing.
- Angry outbursts, bullying behaviour towards a sibling, parent or friend.

These signs may possibly indicate bullying, but there could be many other reasons for these changes. Noticing these signs is a good starting point for talking to your child to find out more. Could there be something else bothering them? Have there been changes in your family, or other incidents that may have upset them? Opening up communication with them in a non-judgemental way is important whatever the reason.

What should I do if I think my child is being bullied?

- Bullying is a serious problem and can be very upsetting for both you and your child so it must be taken seriously.
- Bullying is frightening and children may find it hard to talk about being bullied or bullying others so it is important that you listen to your child without interrupting and give them time to express their feelings, which may be different from your feelings as a parent. Talking about their situation and feeling listened to can lessen many of your child's worries.
- Make a note of what your child says has happened, who was involved and specific details of incidents. Give your child a say in how they would like the situation to be dealt with, but be clear that it is important the bullying stops and that the school may need to be involved.
- Report the situation to a member of school staff as soon as possible and make an appointment to visit the school. It is important to explain that bullying is the reason for your request to enable the school to investigate prior to the meeting. It is a legal requirement for all school's to have an Anti-Bullying Policy in place and your school will have a range of measures to support your child in school. The law also grants schools the power to take action over incidents that happen away from school in certain circumstances. If the incident involves cyberbullying, it is important that your child keeps a record of any text messages, emails or conversations that have taken place online wherever possible. Such records can further assist the school in investigating the incident.
- Ask for a record to be kept of what is said at the meeting, agree a named contact at the school and ask that both yourself and your child are kept informed over the action taken to resolve the situation and the outcomes.
- Give the school time to investigate the situation thoroughly and to deal with the situation in an appropriate manner.
- In the meantime keep supporting your child and ask at the meeting if there are measures the school can take to further support your child. For example, many schools run 'Peer Mentoring' programmes and lunchtime clubs that allow children time to speak to their peers in confidence and support each other through problems.

- Do encourage your child to continue attending school and keep in regular contact with the school. This will also help maintain any positive friendships your child has.
- Praise and encourage your child and explore ways in which you can empower your child and help them to build or re-build their confidence. Activities that are both challenging and enjoyable can have a positive effect on a child's self esteem and can further increase their resilience. These positive benefits may help your child feel confident enough to deal effectively with any bullying they encounter in the future. Their increased confidence may also have the effect of dissuading other children from any attempt to bully your child.



What can the school do?

Schools have a duty of care towards your child and can be enormously helpful once they are aware that there is a bullying concern. A discussion with the class teacher or tutor would be a good place to start. Anti-Bullying must be included in the school policies and it is important that the school shows your child that bullying is taken seriously. It is also important that the school keeps your child informed about the action they have taken. Action taken by the school may include:

- support for the victim or target child,
- working with the bully to change their behaviour,
- deciding an appropriate disciplinary response for the bully,
- speaking to the parents of all parties involved,
- encouraging empathy and a genuine apology from the bully,
- monitoring pupil's future behaviour,
- whole school assemblies or anti-bullying activities,
- involving other agencies to provide anti-bullying workshops or training.

Working in partnership with schools

- If the bullying continues, contact the Head of Year, Deputy Head and or Headteacher. The school will have an Anti-Bullying Policy that they can share with you and keep you up to date with their actions and any outcomes. You may feel that you need to take this further by writing to the school governing body. It is important that you follow the school complaints procedure for guidance on doing this. [A copy of this procedure should be available on request from the school.]
- Try to stay positive. Do not give up. Try to be patient – the nature of bullying can make it difficult to change the perpetrator’s behaviour straight away. It may be that the school staff are working hard to deal with the issues but have not let you know what is happening.
- Take care of yourself. Coping with your child’s bullying may be very stressful, especially if it brings back memories of your own experiences. Try to make time for yourself or talk over what you feel with a friend or family member.
- We understand that parents may be anxious or frustrated when trying to support their child if they are being bullied. However we do not advise any of the following:
 - encouraging your child to hit back. Retaliation can sometimes make the problem worse and can in some cases lead to your child becoming a bully or getting into trouble themselves.
 - confronting other children or their parents yourself.
 - taking your frustration out on school staff by aggressive behaviour or bullying them.
 - keeping your child out of school.

All of these responses are likely to make the situation worse.

It is in the best interests of the school to work with you to help your child, please try to be patient and work in partnership.

What should I do if my child is bullying others?

We recommend that families of children who bully are recognised as needing responsive and appropriate help and that family support and community based services may need to be involved.

Some reasons why children and young people bully others:

- They don't know it is wrong.
- They are copying friends, siblings or family members.
- They haven't learned healthy ways of interacting with others and making relationships.
- They are part of a group of peers who encourage each other to bully.
- They are going through a difficult time and may be acting out aggressive feelings and insecurities.
- They have been or are being bullied themselves.

To stop your child bullying:

- Do not ignore the issue. Explain to your child that what they are doing is unacceptable and makes other children unhappy.
- Encourage your child to empathise and consider the impact of their behaviour on others. Let them know that they may end up with no real friends themselves if they continue to be unkind.
- Listen to your child and try to draw out what is upsetting them and causing their behaviour.
- Discourage any other members of your family from bullying behaviour.
- Model positive social skills and thoughtful behaviour for your child to copy.
- Praise your child for any improvements in their behaviour. This will encourage them to stop bullying altogether.
- Make an appointment with a member of the school staff to explain the problems your child is experiencing, discuss how you and the school can work together to help. School staff can access specialist support for you or your child if that would be helpful.

What should I do if my child witnesses bullying?

Due to the nature of bullying and the secrecy and fear involved, it can be very difficult for children who are being bullied to tell someone and to ask for help.

Children who are not directly involved, but who witness bullying have a very important role to play and the potential to have a profound impact in terms of tackling bullying.

It is vital that any bullying witnessed is brought to the attention of school staff or another appropriate adult depending on the setting. Sometimes children need help to understand the effect their behaviour is having on others. All Bracknell Forest schools have procedures in place to deal with incidents of bullying.

We would also encourage children to support each other. Being on the receiving end of bullying can be a very lonely and frightening place to be. Children can have a very positive impact by supporting their friends or peers who are being bullied.



What support is available?

Seeking support when things are difficult is a positive step. There is a growing list of dedicated professional organisations that are committed to helping children, young people and adults with bullying and related issues.

Support available in Bracknell Forest:

Anti-Bullying Group

Email: anti.bullying@bracknell-forest.gov.uk

Website: www.bracknell-forest.gov.uk/liv-anti-bullying-group.htm

Local Safeguarding Children Board

Website: www.bracknell-forest.gov.uk/safeguardingchildren

Youthline

Telephone: 01344 311200

Email: info@youthlineuk.com

Website: www.youthlineuk.com

Education Welfare Service

Telephone: 01344 354 000

Connexions

Website: www.connexions-berkshire.org.uk

Support available nationwide:

Parentline Plus (a free, 24 hour, 7 days a week, confidential support line)

Telephone: 0808 800 2222

Textphone: 0800 783 6783.

Email: parentsupport@parentlineplus.org

Website: www.parentlineplus.org.uk or www.besomeonetotell.org.uk

YoungMinds Parents Information Service

Telephone: 0808 802 5544

Website: www.youngminds.org.uk

Kidscape

Telephone: 08451 205 204

Helpline: 0845 205 204

Website: www.kidscape.org.uk

Continued overleaf

NSPCC/Childline

Telephone: 0800 1111

Website: www.childline.org.uk

Anti-Bullying Alliance

Website: www.anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk

Childnet (for information on cyber-bullying)

Website: www.childnet-int.org

CEOP

Website: www.thinkuknow.co.uk



Bracknell Forest Local Safeguarding Children Board
Safeguarding Children Together