



BULLYING

What is bullying?

Bullying is repeated aggression, verbal, psychological or physical, conducted by an individual or group against others.

It can cause fear, upset, social isolation and loss of self esteem.

There are many different types of bullying that can occur, some of the more common types are: **verbal, physical, exclusion, extortion and cyber-bullying.**

Verbal: persistent name-calling directed at the same individual(s), which hurts, insults or humiliates.

Physical: includes (for example) pushing, shoving, punching and kicking. Personal property can be the focus of attention for the bully. This may result in damage to clothing, school books etc.

Exclusion: a child is deliberately isolated, excluded or ignored by some or all of the class or peer group.

Extortion: demands for money, possessions or food, often accompanied by threats.

Cyber-bullying: utilises web pages, e-mails and text messaging to bully.

Symptoms of being bullied

The following signs/symptoms may suggest that a child is being bullied:-

- anxiety about travelling to and from school
- fear of going out to the yard at school break times
- dreading going to school each day
- loss of trust in friends
- loss of confidence and self-esteem
- unexplained or poorly explained physical injury
- deterioration in educational performance, loss of concentration and loss of enthusiasm and interest in school
- pattern of physical illnesses e.g. headaches, stomach aches
- unexplained changes either in mood or behaviour. These may be particularly noticeable before returning to school after weekends or more especially after the school holidays
- visible signs of anxiety or distress e.g. stammering, withdrawing, nightmares, difficulty in sleeping, crying, not eating, vomiting, bedwetting
- possessions missing or damaged
- increased requests for money or stealing (to meet extortion demands)

Why do children bully?

Children become bullies for many reasons, for example they may be:

- feeling insecure
- experiencing bullying themselves
- finding it difficult to fit in with other children
- feeling under pressure to succeed
- experiencing humiliation and in turn humiliate other children
- lacking boundaries and their behaviour may be going unchallenged at home
- experiencing physical, sexual or emotional abuse.

Dealing with bullying behaviour in schools

The school is in a unique position to promote attitudes and to shape patterns of behaviour which are positive and caring. The school should provide an environment where the child is physically safe and happy and where good relationships are fostered between pupils, teachers, parents and others involved in the running of the school.

Parents have a responsibility to share in the task of equipping their children with a range of skills which will help them in their dealings with others.

What if my child tells me they are being bullied?

- Talk to your child about bullying now! Empower your child with information and skills before they encounter bullying behaviour
- LISTEN to your child
- Ask questions but don't interrogate
- Avoid treating your child as a victim
- Work with your child's school where appropriate
- Help your child to build their confidence and self esteem in other areas. This can be supported through your child engaging in out of school activities, such as sports, music or art activities.
- Approach your child's teacher if the bullying is school related. It is important to understand that bullying in school can be difficult for teachers to detect because of the large numbers of children present. Addressing bullying in schools requires that parents, children and teachers work together for a resolution.
- All schools must have an "Anti-Bullying" policy. You should familiarise yourself with your school's policy, so you know the steps to be taken if required.

NPC receives calls each year from parents who feel their children are being bullied by the teacher or the Principal. A teacher may, unwittingly or otherwise, engage in, or reinforce bullying behaviour.

In the case of a complaint regarding a staff member, you should, in the first instance raise the issue with the staff member in question and/or if necessary, with the Principal.

Where cases, relating to either a pupil or a teacher remain unresolved at school level, the matter should be referred to the School's Board of Management.

What if my child is bullying?

- Don't panic. Stay calm and try not to overreact
- Get your child to talk about it and find out what s/he thinks is going on
- Go to the school right away and find out how your child behaves in class
- Enlist the teacher's help in dealing with this. It is important that you both take the same approach.

Your aim should be to get cooperation without building resentment. Try to pass on responsibility, not blame, focus on the bullying behaviour not the child and solutions rather than problems.

Cyber-bullying

Cyber-bullying is a form of bullying which is carried out through an internet service such as email, a chat room, a discussion group, online social networking, instant messaging or web pages. It can also include bullying through mobile phone technologies such as texting.

Cyber-bullying can happen to anyone and the bully can act anonymously if they want. People can also be bullied online by groups of people such as class groups or collective members of an online community.

It's really important that children learn how to protect themselves online and learn how to respond if they are being cyber-bullied.

If your child is being cyber-bullied it is possible that they are feeling powerless and isolated.

All of the information and support regarding bullying applies to cyber-bullying. However there are other options which can help in cases of cyber-bullying that are specific to bullying using technological mediums.

Things you/your child can do:

- **Keep a record** (including time and date) - this may help in finding out who is sending the messages.
- **Don't reply** - the situation may get worse if your child replies to any bullying messages. By replying the bully gets what he or she wants...a reaction. Often, if your child doesn't reply the bully will leave them alone.
- **Tell someone** - ensure your child knows that they should talk to someone they trust, a parent, friend, or teacher.
- **Contact your child's mobile phone or internet service provider and report what is happening** - they can help you block messages or calls from certain senders.
- **Seek support if messages are threatening or serious** - if the cyber-bullying becomes threatening seek support from services in your area for example the Gardáí.
- **Change your child's contact details** - get a new user name for the internet, a new email account, a new mobile phone number and ensure your child only gives them out to their closest friends.
- **Keep your username and passwords private** - ensure your child keeps his/her personal information private so it becomes less likely that someone will misuse it.

How much **bullying** takes place in our schools and other youth environments depends on the role that committed adults play in their **schools**, their **families**, and their **communities**.

Remember - Bullying is not a fact of life!

NPC operates a **Helpline** which provides support and information for parents on how to deal with situations relating to the issue of bullying.

The Helpline is open from **10am - 5pm Monday - Wednesday** and **10am - 4pm Thursday & Friday**.

To contact the Helpline **Tel: 01 887 4477** or **email: helpline@npc.ie**

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