

# Working with parents and carers

## Resource for schools



SEN & Disability  
developing effective anti-bullying practice

Achievement for All 

## Acknowledgements

This resource is reproduced with the kind permission of East Sussex County Council Anti-Bullying Team, from their Practitioners' Toolkit: *Responding to bullying of children & young people with special educational needs and disabilities*.

This resource also acknowledges the role of Contact-a-Family, one of the key programme partners, in developing constructive and supportive communication between parents and schools.

## Working with parents and carers

Parents and carers have a vital role to play in supporting their child who may be at risk of being bullied, or is being bullied. Like siblings, they can help identify and monitor incidents of bullying behaviour, but can also be called upon to reinforce or reassert anti-bullying strategies with their child at home.

If you are about to start working with parents or carers of a disabled child or young person or those with SEN it is important to remind them that while it is understandable for a parent/carer to be anxious about the risks of bullying behaviour, not all disabled children and young people and those with SEN are bullied.

## An excellent resource from Contact a Family

Contact a Family have compiled a tremendous resource to support the families of disabled children and those with SEN to complement the programme.

The resource covers areas such as what is bullying, spotting the signs of bullying, bullying out of school and on mobile technologies, how to report bullying, and even areas such as what to do if your child is exhibiting bullying behaviour.

**It is strongly recommended that this resource is downloaded, printed, and given to parents who might be worried about bullying. Please follow the link below:**

[http://www.cafamily.org.uk/media/793674/dealing\\_with\\_bullying.pdf](http://www.cafamily.org.uk/media/793674/dealing_with_bullying.pdf)

Contact a Family helpline: 0808 808 3555

[www.cafamily.org.uk](http://www.cafamily.org.uk)



## What parents say

These tables are reproduced with permission from ‘**Perspectives of Bullying and Difference**’ (McLaughlin, Byers and Oliver 2012). The views of parents, young people, practitioners and researchers were reviewed and summarised.

Parents and carers advise teachers in dealing with this issue to take the following steps. (For brevity, this table uses ‘parents’ to mean ‘parents and carers’.)

**Table 4.1: Guidance for school practitioners (p.66)**

- 1. Listen to the person reporting the bullying** Parents stress that it is essential that if their child reports bullying to another adult in school, the appropriate response of the teacher is to believe that they are telling the truth. The consequences of a child reporting bullying to an adult at home or at school and feeling that they are not listened to or believed are damaging and far reaching.
- 2. Listen to the parents** Parents are the experts in their child’s behaviour and disability and know when something is wrong. Parents are usually the first people to be either told about the bullying or spot the signs of it through changes in their child’s behaviour. When they report bullying to the school, they want to be believed and listened to, not labelled as ‘causing trouble’ or being ‘overly sensitive’.
- 3. Listen to both sides** Recognise that bullies often have their own problems. Parents know that many children deal with difficult situations and that their bullying may be a consequence of feelings provoked by other wider events. They want all children to be listened to and supported.
- 4. Develop good communication** Parents believe this would help to solve the distrust between parties involved in these situations. It helps all those involved to feel that they are working towards a solution, even when this takes time. Developing good communication applies to all the people involved, that is, between parents and school staff, between pupils, and between the parents of the child suffering the bullying and those carrying out the bullying acts.
- 5. Respond quickly, once a concern has been raised** Many parents reported investigations that took many weeks or months, during which time the child may continue to be bullied or be excluded from activities. This often left parents feeling ‘in limbo’ and as though nothing was being done. It is important that some tangible action or investigation is seen to happen.
- 6. Take action against the bullies** Many parents reported that nothing had happened once they had raised a concern and that no actions were taken against those who had been bullying. Parents suggested appropriate actions could include speaking to the individuals, getting them to acknowledge their actions and apologise; or for the bully to be moved into another class. Other possible actions could be for teachers to use warnings and exclusions (selectively), so that the bully knows they cannot continue with this type of behaviour. Some actions may only need to occur once, and others may require longer term support.
- 7. Use active support techniques** Support the child by, for example, using the circle of friends; a buddy scheme; and safe zones, for when the child is distressed or needs some time alone. Other suggestions include the use of communication cards, which a child in class can use to let the teacher know if they are upset, feeling stressed or in need of support or time out; and offering support to the child in corridors, which would ensure that bad behaviour does not occur between classes.
- 8. Have a positive school-wide ethos towards all forms of disability** Actions could include running awareness sessions on different types of disabilities and the behaviours associated with them, and encouraging better understanding of how and why different people behave in different

ways. This could be facilitated by bringing experts in to talk to the school; or getting students to study famous people who have had a disability.

- 9. Be seen to actively discourage bullying** Run a range of school-wide activities: discussions in class; question-and-answer sessions; projects on bullying and its effects; and anti-bullying assemblies.
- 10. Ensure that all teachers and staff have training in disability awareness** Include guidance on spotting the signs of bullying, as well as techniques for managing the situation when it occurs. Guidance on how to effectively offer support to those involved would also be helpful.
- 11. Develop effective and well-publicised policies on dealing with bullying** Get all children, staff and parents to sign up to them. Make them an essential part of the school's Code of Conduct, as well as the discipline and behaviour guidelines. All parents should be made aware of these in order to know what their opportunities for recourse are if they are not happy with the ways that the policies are being implemented. There should be opportunities for regular monitoring and reviewing of these policies, involving parents and children, including those with disabilities and Special Educational Needs.
- 12. Offer help for the parents and siblings to cope with effects of the bullying** This could include better signposting to local and condition-specific support groups and links to parent/carer forums.
- 13. Educate the wider community** Include other parents, so that they better understand disability and difference.

**Table 4.2: Guidance for parents and carers in approaching schools**

This section presents a number of recommendations made by parents and carers, in order to guide other affected parents and carers on what they could ask the school to do if their child is experiencing bullying.

- 1. Have a named person your child can tell about the bullying** This could be their teacher, support worker or SENCO. Make sure your child knows where they are in the school and how they can find them.
- 2. Have a safe place your child can go to during breaks or lunchtimes** This may be a quiet area, a designated classroom or the library. Make sure the lunchtime supervisors are aware of this provision.
- 3. Create a sign or signal your child can use** This is for use at school, to communicate with staff if they need to leave the room or feel distressed.
- 4. Take responsibility for the behaviour of pupils beyond the school gate** This especially relates to behaviour on transport to and from school.
- 5. Provide training** Give school and local authority staff training in special educational needs and disabilities.
- 6. Be aware of unstructured times** Lunchtime, breaks and when moving around the school are potential times of risk for bullying to occur. These times are not always covered in statements or coordinated support plans, yet support is often needed for young people with SEN and/or disabilities then.
- 7. Do not remove the child who is being bullied from the situation** Remove the child who is exhibiting bullying behaviour instead.

8. **Encourage communication between teaching staff and lunchtime supervisors** This ensures that both are aware of what could be happening in the playground and classrooms.
9. **Provide a safe area of the playground** This will enable young people to feel secure, for instance provide a zone where there is more supervision than in other areas.
10. **Allow children the opportunity to stay indoors during breaks** For example, set up lunchtime clubs and activities.
11. **Provide support at times of transition** This would cover moving from primary to secondary school; or moving from a special school or unit to a mainstream school.
12. **Use the SEAL programme** Otherwise known as the Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning programme, this is a voluntary programme for schools that is designed to develop the social, emotional and behavioural skills of all pupils.
13. **Use the 'Circle of Friends' programme** This is a structured programme, based on the concept of six to eight volunteers creating a support network for the young person; providing encouragement and recognition for progress made; working with them to identify any difficulties; and devising and implementing practical ideas to deal with difficulties.
14. **Review the anti-bullying policy regularly** Involve parents, carers and pupils in the reviews, including disabled young people and parents of disabled children.
15. **Work on social skills** Work with pupils on practising letting other people speak first, listening to other people's opinions without reacting aggressively, and understanding body language.
16. **Give praise and encouragement** Give this to the young people involved.

## **Effective practice**

### **At Key Stage 2/3 transition, or when moving schools**

- **In any meeting between SENCOs**, along with case notes, plans, statements of individual needs and other performance documentation, exchange details of any logged bullying incidents, especially if recent or ongoing.
- When **meeting parents and carers** for the first time, be open and direct about bullying, school systems to deal with incidents, etc. **This dialogue should take place in the context of the school behaviour policy** (see examples of good practice elsewhere on the hub).
- Good practice would be to give parents and carers a **named contact** if they wish to report a bullying incident, or suspect that their child has been bullied. This may be different to established school procedures.
- **Check in with the young person and parents/carers regularly** especially at transition. Talk openly about bullying, what to do about bullying, and who to go to if bullied. Good practice is to ensure that it is the same person as parents and carers can communicate with.
- Use tools from the **social resilience** toolkit to build confidence and assertiveness if required, and to build friendship-building skills.

## Further tips advice and guidance for parents

- If your child has special educational needs or you think your child might have special educational needs and you are worried about their school life you should speak to your child's teacher or the school's special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCo).
- If you need to talk to someone about your child's special educational needs you can contact your local parent partnership service for confidential and impartial information, advice and support. There is a parent partnership service in every local authority and you can find your local service's details here: <http://www.parentpartnership.org.uk/> or by calling 0207 843 6058.
- You can also get advice about special educational needs and / or disability and bullying via Contact a Family. They have a national SEN helpline. Their number is: 0808 808 3555. Contact a Family also have lots of information on their website about SEN and disabilities:
- <http://www.cafamily.org.uk/advice-and-support/in-your-area/>

## Information, advice and support for parents

There are various organisations that can give parents advice about bullying:

- Contact a Family 0808 808 3555 – can offer information and advice to parents and carers of children with special educational needs and disabilities on a range of issues including bullying.
- Information, advice and support services 020 7843 6058 – statutory services that offer information, advice and support to disabled children and young people and those with SEN and parents and carers of disabled children and those with SEN on a range of education issues including bullying. There is an Information, advice and support service in every local authority in England.
- Family Lives (previously Parentline Plus) 0808 800 2222 for immediate support and advice for parents, 24 hours a day, seven days a week.
- Kidscape 08451 205 204 – A helpline for parents and carers of bullied children is available Mon - Tues: 10am to 8pm; Weds - Fri: 10am to 4pm
- The Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP) Provides help and advice on cyberbullying, the Centre maintains a website for children and young people, and parents and carers about staying safe online.
- Ofsted Parent View website This website has an online questionnaire that allows parents and carers to give their views on their child's school at any time of the year. The questionnaire asks for parents for their opinion on 12 aspects of their child's school, from the quality of teaching, to dealing with bullying and poor behaviour, with a final question as to whether or not they would recommend the school to other parents.



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SEN and disabilities: developing effective anti-bullying practice: A programme of work, led by the Anti-Bullying Alliance and funded by the Department for Education, to reduce the incidence and impact of bullying of children and young people with SEN and/or disabilities in schools.



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