



# **Parent Guide To Bullying**



Surrey Schools

## What is Bullying?

Simply put, bullying is a pattern of unwelcome or aggressive behaviour, often with the goal of making others uncomfortable, scared or hurt. It is almost always used as a way of having control or power over their target and it is often based on another person's appearance, culture, race, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation or gender identity.

All incidents of bullying are serious and need to be addressed. It must be noted that bullying is distinctly different than conflict, as a conflict is generally a disagreement or difference in opinion between peers who typically have equal power in their relationships.

## Types of Bullying

There are four common types of bullying. It is important to identify which type of bullying is impacting your child so you can understand what is happening to them and what you can do to help your child.

**Physical:** includes hitting, kicking, tripping, pinching, pushing or damaging property.

**Verbal:** includes name-calling, insults, teasing, intimidation, homophobic or racist remarks or verbal abuse.

### **Social &**

**Emotional:** also called "relational bullying", includes behavioural actions designed to harm a child's reputation or cause humiliation, like lying and spreading rumours, negative facial gestures, playing mean jokes to embarrass or humiliate a child, mimicking the child in a mean way, encouraging social exclusion of a child, etc.

**Cyber:** includes taunting or humiliation through social media sites (Facebook, Twitter, etc.) or the Internet, cruel websites targeting specific youth, humiliating others while playing online games, verbal or emotional bullying through chat rooms, instant message or texting, posting photos of other youth on rating websites, etc. Cyber bullying is the newest of the four bullying types, and it is constantly evolving as new technology and social media sites are introduced. Cyber bullying has expanded the boundary of bullying, allowing kids to be bullied 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, regardless of where they are – even in their own bedrooms.

## The Bully

Bullying is about power and power is something that some children will naturally want to experiment with. Some kids may use bullying as a way to enhance their social power and protect their prestige with their peers. Some kids actually use bullying to deflect taunting and aggression that is directed towards them – a form of self-protection.

There are usually many reasons why a child might engage in bullying behaviour including:

- lack of warmth and true involvement from their parents
- overly-permissive parenting
- harsh, physical discipline from their parents
- lack of self-confidence
- poor behaviour modeled at home by their parents or siblings or other adults in their lives
- poor behaviour modeled in the community or in school by their peers
- attempt to gain power in reaction to being bullied by others

Children who bully may turn into teens who sexually harass, become involved in delinquent behaviours, display gang-associated behaviour or engage in dating violence. **Research shows that bullies are seven times more likely than other students to carry weapons to school. It also shows that children who acted as bullies in grades 6 to 9 are six times more likely to have a criminal record by the age of 24.**

## What are Effective Ways for Parents to Deal with their Child who is Bullied?

Bullying can be a tough topic to bring up with your kids, but it is an important conversation.

Bullying and aggression are often a **cry for help**. It is important to be open to the possibility that your child could be in one of these roles. The most important thing you can do as a parent is to listen and not dismiss your child when they want to talk – they may only try once.

Parents should not over or under react when being told by their child they have been bullied at school. Parents should encourage the child to stay away from the alleged bully and let the school investigate and remedy the problem.

Parents must also not dismiss the child's experience. If a child has the courage to tell someone they have been bullied, it could be devastating to be told to "work it out for yourself" or "they are just teasing you".

Parents should encourage their child to keep talking about the incident if the child feels the need to discuss. A way to open conversation with your child is to ask them to rate their day. Follow up questions must be open-ended and allow the child to explain what went well for them, or if they had a challenging day, to explore that in a safe and gentle way, keeping the lines of communication open so their child doesn't shut down. Parents need to provide extra support and encouragement to the child during these times.

When a parent is exposed to bullying with their child for the first time, it is imperative that the parents are supported and encouraged to come to the school to gain a factual understanding of the incident. Working together with the parent, the school can build a plan for intervention, support and resolution. This can be a very unsettling time for a parent and their immediate reaction will often be to protect their child. To some parents, this may mean withdrawing their child from school. However, by working together, the school can help provide the parents and student with strategies to build the child's resilience and problem solving skills.