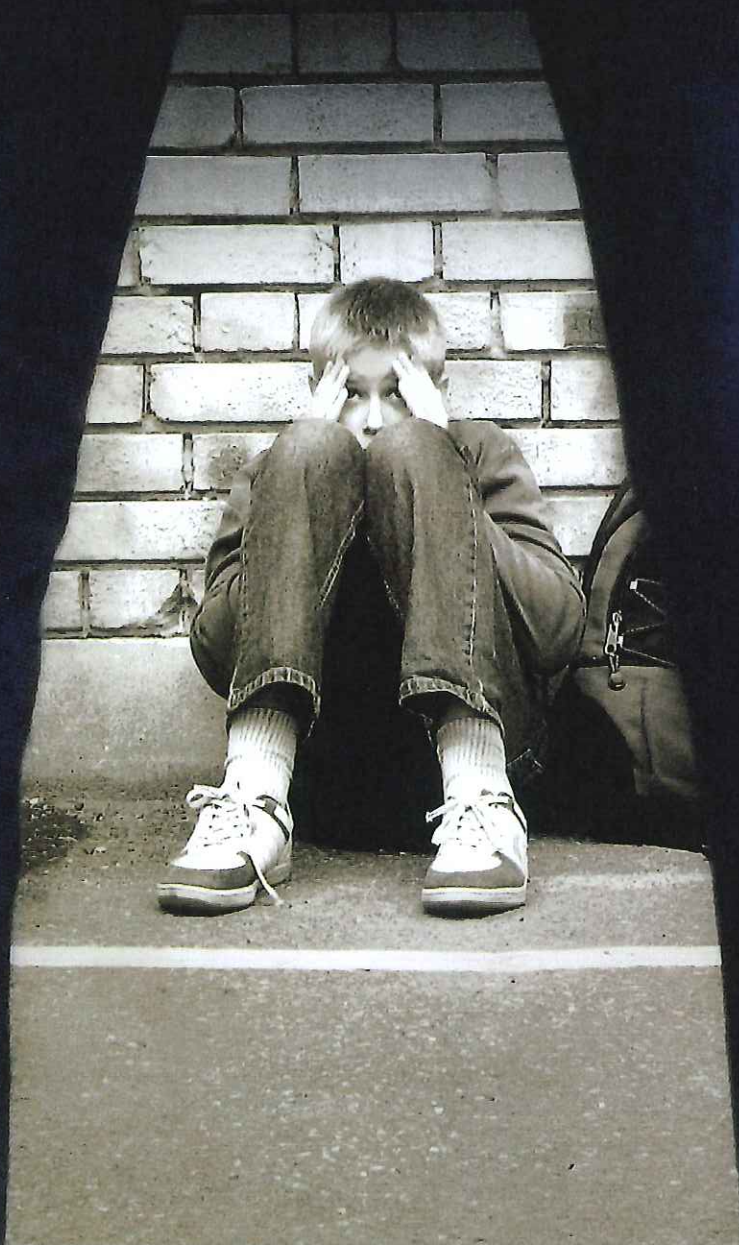


Say NO to bullying

A handbook for parents

by Julie Casey M.Ed., C.Psychol.



Dedication

This book is dedicated to my parents, Anne and David. They have loved and supported me through my childhood, through the ups and downs of my (interesting) adolescence, through my marriage to my soulmate, Martin, and through the upbringing of my wonderful children: Richard, Mia, Holly and Scott (as well as that of several rather more haphazard arrivals in our home). I thank you for your love, for your kindness, for doing your best, and for your integrity.

I love you both so much and don't tell you often enough.

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How to use this booklet

How can I help at home?

The most important things you can do to help your child to understand, help prevent, and deal with bullying are to:

- Know what your child will be learning about bullying at school (by reading this booklet for example!)
- Encourage and support them in trying out the skills they are learning at school
- Model using non-bullying behaviour yourself, and showing respect for other people

This third role is probably the most difficult – unfortunately it is also the most important! Children are programmed to learn by watching, by trying out what they see others doing and by repeating behaviour that is rewarded.

“Don’t worry that your children are not listening to a word you say – worry that they are watching everything you do!”

The chances are that you, like the author and your child’s teachers, didn’t learn these important skills at school – and this means that unless we do some learning too, we’re going to find it hard to model the skills we want our children to develop.

One way to use this booklet is to read it through, then talk about the case studies, information and ideas with your child, using them to open up a discussion about bullying, and to let them know that you will be there to listen and support them at any time they need to talk. Keep the booklet available for reference – you never know when it might come in handy!

Good luck!

What do schools do about bullying?

This booklet tells you about the sort of things that your child will be learning at school about bullying and how you can help your child at home – it is useful to refer to whenever you have a concern about bullying.

Schools must by law have an anti-bullying policy (which tells you what the school will do if bullying is reported, and also what the school is doing to stop bullying happening in the first place).



This work helps schools to stop bullying happening by:

- Making sure that all children and adults mean the same thing when they talk about bullying.
- Helping children to understand how bullying feels for the person being bullied.
- Making sure that all children feel OK about telling an adult when they know that bullying is going on.
- Making sure that all children know exactly what to do if they are being bullied, and feel confident that something will be done to stop it.
- Helping children enjoy, celebrate and respect the ways we are all different, as well as the ways in which we are similar, and to feel good about themselves.

Useful anti-bullying information about my child's school

What is it like for parents? A Case Study

There is something about knowing that your child is being bullied that brings out our most primitive protective instincts.

When my seven year old son (who has Asperger's Syndrome, which means among other things that he finds it difficult to make friends) asked me to write a note to a little girl who had just started at his school, inviting her to tea, I positively glowed with excitement at the prospect of his days being made happier by having a friend (a first!).

The little girl had played with him the day before, obviously not yet aware that it was the height of uncoolness to bother with the 'loser kid'. The next day at playtime, he plucked up the courage to give her the note I had written with such high hopes.



Immediately a group formed around her, whispering and giggling as he stood on the sidelines as always.

As I washed up later, he told me what had happened and asked me innocently – 'Why did she tear the note up and throw it on the ground mummy?'

Nearly seventeen years later I have tears in my eyes writing this.

All I wanted to do was to march up to the school, demanding that the child be removed immediately (or better still publicly flogged!).

What is it like for parents? A Case Study

I was even ready to tell them that if something wasn't done straight away I would sort it out myself – and while I was at it, I would teach those children who had joined in with the cruelty a lesson they wouldn't forget as well!

Underneath the rage were layers of feelings - helplessness at not being able to help my beautiful, innocent son to stand up to these bullies, inadequacy (what sort of parent allowed this to happen to their son? What had we done wrong?) and even resentment and frustration with the difficulties he was born with that made these incidents so much a part of his life.

The second thing I desperately wanted to do was to find some magic words or advice that would protect him from it happening again. So I told him that bullying is just a part of life which builds character, and that if he ignored them they would stop. But they didn't, and I felt awful because now he felt even more frightened and alone - the only person he thought could help him hadn't been able to.

My friends were full of advice – tell him to fight back, to stand up to them, to shout 'sticks and stones may break my bones...'. He tried, but they were stronger and there were more of them. They laughed at his efforts and he came home and sobbed, feeling worse than before. Now he said he felt like a double failure – once for being bullied, and again for not being able to stop it.



What is it like for parents? A Case Study



And so we suggested that he change whatever it was about him that was causing him to be bullied – maybe his clothes, his hair? Could he try harder to fit in? But new clothes and a haircut made no difference.

When I found myself trying to teach him a new way to walk (the latest thing wrong with him, in their eyes), it dawned on me that no matter what he did they would

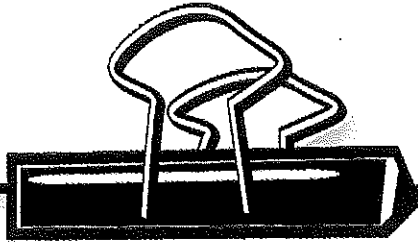
always find something new to pick on. It was them who had to change!

I often think how different my son's time at school might have been if schools and parents had known and done more about bullying. Would someone have challenged the fact that he was never included in playground games? Might he have had at least one friend if they had been taught to understand difference in a more positive way? Might some children have found the courage to stand up to those who were whispering and giggling? Might the children have thought twice about their behaviour if they understood how it felt to be bullied? I think the answer is yes and welcome the work that schools now do in anti-bullying week, and the rest of the year because of it.

***If your child
is being bullied:
www.familylives.org.uk
(Tel: 0808 800 2222)***

Pause for Thought

*Between 15 and 25
children commit suicide
every year because of
bullying – it's up to us
– all of us, schools and
parents, to do some-
thing about it.*



Fascinating Fact...

Why schools don't just get rid of bullies ...

Parents are often surprised when schools don't automatically exclude children who are bullying others. Of course, as parents, our first concern will always be for our own child's safety and happiness. It is natural to ask why the school seems to want to work with their tormentors instead of getting rid of them.

There are three reasons. Firstly, if schools excluded every child guilty of bullying, they might have very few children left! The majority of children have been bullied, seen bullying and bullied themselves. There is no evidence that children are born 'bullies' or 'victims' – they change roles according to where they are and who they are with.

Secondly, if schools simply move the problem on to another school, others will continue to suffer. Surely the best thing to do is to deal with the problem and try to stop the child from bullying altogether? Of course, the school will always have the right to exclude them if their efforts don't change the situation. But the third, and most important, reason is that there **are** ways of changing bullying behaviour. Helping them to understand their target's feelings and the effect of their behaviour on them (developing their empathy), teaching them to stand up to peer pressure from others, giving them support to manage the problems they are facing in their own lives – all of these things can change bullying behaviour for good.

So when you feel like the parent in the case study, try to understand what the school is doing, and why. When children who are bullied are asked what they want to happen they very rarely mention punishing the other child or revenge, they almost always say:

'I just want it to stop'.

Maybe we should think the same way!

Quick Checklist: What bullying is (and isn't!).
In SEAL your child will learn that bullying:

1. ...goes on for a while, or happens regularly.
2. ...is deliberate. The other person wants to hurt, humiliate or harm the target.
3.involves someone (or several people) who are stronger in some way than the person being bullied. The person doing the bullying has more power; they are older, stronger, there are more of them or they have some 'hold' over the target (e.g. they know a secret about them).

Because these three things have to happen together for something to be called 'bullying', they will learn that bullying is not:

- A one-off fight or argument
- A friend sometimes being nasty
- An argument with a friend

- Be a good role-model in the way you talk about and treat others – your child will learn that everybody deserves 'respect'.
- Model empathy for others – talk about how other people might feel in different situations: in real-life, TV programmes, books, films, and play.

- Talk openly about what bullying is and how it feels – see the checklist above and use the case studies.
- Make it safe for children to talk about bullying – let them know you won't make them feel silly whatever their worries.
- Talk to children about different sorts of bullying. As well as physical harm, threats and taking stuff, it can include name-calling, leaving someone out (exclusion), rumour spreading or forcing children to do something they don't want to do. All of these can be as hurtful and humiliating as physical bullying.
- Teach them how to avoid electronic (cyber) bullying. See the Cut Out and Keep guide on page 19.

What's it like to be bullied? A Year 6's story

They say that bullying is worse when they kick you or punch you, or if they take your stuff – but at least people *understand* that. The way they do it, it seems like nothing to anyone else. How can I tell my teacher? I can see it now....

They give me dodgy looks before playtime

So, they, er... look at you? Hmm – do you think you might be being a bit oversensitive?

They look straight at me and fall about laughing

I'm sure it's just a bit of fun... Have you tried joining in with the laughing?

They mutter names under their breath when I walk past

Well, I really don't think they do... I have never heard either of them use those words – they are such nice boys...

They 'accidentally' bump into me

Come on now, a little bit of rough and tumble never hurt anyone.

How can I explain that one sort of bullying is no worse than another – the fact is that I feel sick before I come to school, that I will find any excuse not to go out to play, that I hate it when the teacher has to leave the room, and jump at the slightest movement even when I'm at home in my room. Now I've got my mobile it's even worse – I used to feel safe at home – now they can get me anywhere.

The thing is, you live in constant fear; it's like before a test or an exam, a dread in the stomach, a physical sickness. You never know what they're going to do or when – sometimes it's almost better when it's happening because that awful anxiety is over for the moment. You can't concentrate at school, and you feel like such a loser because you just can't seem to stop it. People tell you to stand up to them (how?), to fight back (if I could do that they probably wouldn't be picking on me in the first place), to say something clever (yeah, right). Even my old mates join in with the laughter sometimes. It feels like there's no way out. Worst of all – I feel completely alone.

TOP TIPS:**What to do if your child is being bullied**

- Your child may not tell you that he or she is being bullied. If you suspect it is happening, look out for the signs (see the check-list below).
- If your child tells you they are being bullied, *keep calm*. Getting angry and threatening to visit the school or parent of the other child will terrify your child further. Try to avoid the automatic responses that we tend to have (see 'What is it like for parents?' P.5.). These tend to focus on what should happen to the bully, and about how your child should change *themselves*. This can confirm to them that they are somehow to blame for the bullying. **THEY ARE NOT!**

Quick Checklist: How do I know if my child is being bullied?

If you think your child is being bullied, look out for:

- behaviour changes,
- withdrawal,
- not wanting to go to school,
- lots of stomach-aches, headaches or non-specific illness.

Sometimes these ailments will be real, and sometimes they may be made-up – but whether the illness is real or not, the worry certainly is, so it needs to be taken seriously.

Help your child to talk to you. Use books and TV plots to open discussions about bullying. With younger children puppets are a good way to help them talk about their worries and feelings.



TOP TIPS: What to do if your child is being bullied (continued)

- Praise your child for telling you and reassure them that they have done the right thing in letting you know what is happening.
- Remind children of how they can manage their feelings, e.g. talking, relaxing, exercising, distracting themselves.
- Use your best listening skills. Accept your child's feelings, encourage them to talk about their worries by *listening*, and don't belittle what they are going through – however minor it may seem to you the feelings are very real for them.

Oh, come on, it's not that bad - she only looked at you.

- Don't jump in with advice or try to immediately solve the problem for them. Listen to their ideas, and unless they are likely to end up in serious danger or trouble, agree to let them try out their ideas.
- If you tell your child to fight back, or say something 'clever' to the people they may well end up feeling twice as bad. They might get into trouble, they might get hurt, they might be laughed at more, and they will feel a double failure – not only are they bullied, but they have failed to stop it as well.

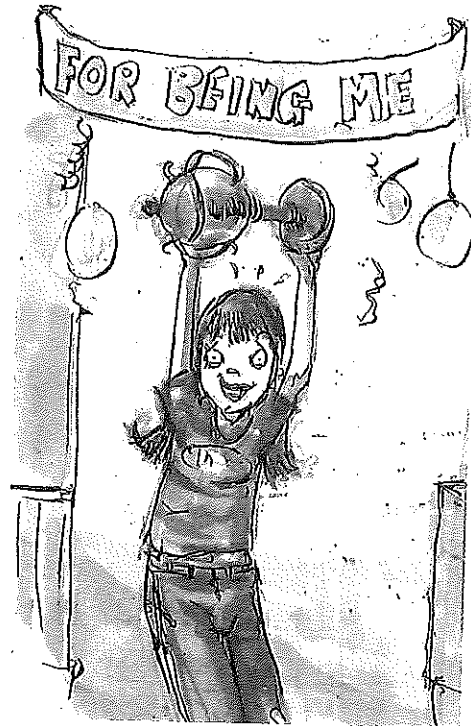


TOP TIPS:

What to do if your child is being bullied (continued)

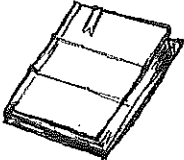
'Well, that's all very well but what am I supposed to do when they start on me?'

- Bullying destroys our confidence, so if your child is being bullied, work doubly hard to help them feel valued and important.
- Help your child to think about what they would like to happen, and ask how you can help. Don't rush this step (unless you feel that as an adult you **MUST** take action)*.
- Teach your child 'fogging'. It is outlined in the Cut Out and Keep Guide on page 21.
- If the bullying carries on after your child has tried out their own strategies, and any that you agree together, there are further steps that you can take – see the checklist on the next page.



* *If your child feels in danger, you will need to make sure that they have a plan for keeping safe. Talk about ways of avoiding the children doing the bullying, e.g. staying with a group of friends, staying in safe areas, knowing who to go to for help etc. Tell your child that you have to involve your child's teacher at this point, and agree how you can do this in the best way (so that other children aren't aware of the visit for example).*

Quick Checklist : Further steps to take if the bullying doesn't stop

- Collect any evidence, e.g. keep a diary of who did what, exactly what they said or did, how often it happened, when and where; keep any text messages, emails, website comments or posting. 
- Alert the school. Make sure you talk to your child before you do this but be clear that this is what you must do. Agree with your child when the best time is for you to go (maybe when the children have gone home), as they will worry that this will make things worse.
- When you talk to the school, stay calm and give specific details from the diary you have kept (names, dates and places). Ask what they will do about it and also what they would advise you to do. Remember that you are partners and both want the best for your child, so do your best not to fall out with the school – this NEVER makes things better!
- You have a right to ask for the anti-bullying policy (all schools have to have one by law) and look at it together to make a plan to tackle your worries. Make sure the plan includes follow-ups, so that you know when you will see or hear from them again.
- If, after you have made the plan with the school and followed it up, you are still not happy with the situation, you have a right to contact the school governors. If this does not help, the next step would be to contact the local authority who will have a person who deals with anti-bullying to advise you on any further action.

TOP TIPS:**What to do if your child knows bullying is going on*****Fascinating Fact .. Why don't witnesses tell?***

Nine times out of ten bullying involves witnesses. So why don't they stop it, or tell? Children tell us that even when they feel upset or angry about the bullying, they don't tell because:

- * They worry that they will become targets themselves*
- * It is not cool to be seen as a 'grass'*
- * It is hard to go against the crowd*

And yet, the evidence shows that the more children tell about any bullying they see going on, the less it happens.

We need to help our children to feel safe to tell us, and adults at school, if they know that bullying is happening.

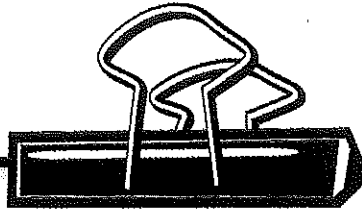
- Help your child open up to you, and listen to your child's concerns. Let them talk about their feelings without jumping in with opinions and advice.
- There is always strength in numbers. Encourage your child to talk to others at school who feel the same way that they do, and to swap ideas about what to do.
- Help your child to look at bullying in the same way as they would any situation in which someone might get seriously hurt. They would not consider reporting a small child who is about to cross a dangerous road as 'grassing', and bullying can be just as dangerous!
- Talk to your child about what they can do to support a child who is being bullied. Some ideas are to befriend the other child and be kind to them, include them in their games, tell an adult what is going on and, (if safe) get a group together to challenge the children who are doing the bullying.

TOP TIPS: What to do if your child is bullying others



- If you are told that your child is bullying others, stay calm. Don't immediately dismiss the idea ('What? My John - never!') or rush into punishing them severely. Try not to call them a 'bully' – a label can stick, and we are all capable of bullying others at times.

- Your child is not a monster! When you talk, stay calm and remind them that you love *them* – it is *the behaviour* that you do not like or approve of.
- Listen to what they have to say. If they deny it, arrange to see the teacher. Stay calm and listen to what the teacher has to say – you might like to brush up on your conflict management skills before the meeting.
- Talk to them about how the other person feels – they may not realise how much they are hurting, frightening or upsetting the other person.
- Help your child to develop confidence, to make friends – happy people don't need to bully others!



Fascinating Fact .. Why do children bully?

Children who regularly bully others at the age of 8 are FIVE times more likely to end up in prison than those who don't....

*Children bully
because:*

- *they want to be 'in' with the cool gang*
- *it feels like fun - they don't realise how much it hurts*
- *they dislike or are jealous of someone*
- *it makes them feel powerful or respected*
- *it gets them what they want (sweets, money)*
- *they are bullied themselves and are taking out their hurt and anger on someone who won't fight back*
- *they are having problems in their life that are making them feel bad*



REMEMBER: *People who are happy with themselves do not need to bully other people!*

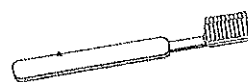
A cut out and keep reminder to try the ideas!



Cut Out and Keep Guide

Keep safe from cyber-bullying!

1. Always ask before you send a picture or information that could be shared with other people. Remember that you don't know what will happen to any pictures or information you let people have. What you think of as a joke might be really upsetting for the other person when the whole world sees it.
2. Think before you send a message about yourself or any other people involved. It doesn't take long for it to be shared with every single person you know (from your best friend to your grandmother to your worst enemy!).
3. Never give out personal information when it can be shared with others. You may trust your new friends, but you don't know his or her friends...
4. Treat your password like your toothbrush
– don't let anyone else use it!
5. If you receive nasty messages, texts, comments etc., block the person sending them and always report it to an adult (a parent, someone at school, or your service provider).
6. Don't reply to a bullying message but do keep it – whether it is a picture, message or online communication. For more information see www.kidscape.org.uk/cyberbullying/



Cut out and keep guide: Dealing with bullying by 'Fogging'



Cut Out and Keep Guide Dealing with bullying by 'Fogging'

When people are horrible to us we want to be horrible back. The trouble with this is that we might get hurt, they might be even more unkind and we might even get into trouble (which is really not fair, but it does happen!).

Fogging can give us a way to stop the things the people bullying us might say from hurting us, and also can stop us from 'rising to the bait' (which lets them win).

Remember that the person bullying you is often saying things about you because of something that is wrong in their life. Or they may enjoy the fact that they can 'wind you up', especially in front of an audience. Often what people who bully like is the feeling of power they get when you react as they want you to. Fogging stops them from getting this pleasure, but doesn't put you in danger.

Fogging: How to do it

- Remind yourself that
 - The person bullying you has said this to many other people – what they say tells us more about them than you.
 - They want to see a good reaction – take away the satisfaction!
- Imagine a great fog around you which swallows up insults so they cannot get under your skin.
- Use a normal, bored-sounding voice and say something neutral (that doesn't make them mad)

'yeah, whatever'
'if you say so'
'well, you could be right'
'maybe'
'ummm'
'yes that's true (e.g. I do wear glasses)'.

- Make sure your body language, tone of voice and the words you use all give the same message: 'I'm really not bothered by anything you say or do'.
- Stick with it. It probably won't work the first time.

Helplines and websites:

www.childline.org.uk (Tel: 0800 11 11)

www.bullying.co.uk

www.familylives.org.uk (Tel: 0808 800 2222)



Bully Diary (sample page)

DATE	What happened	Details: who, where, etc	Action taken/ Evidence

MY NOTES

A large, empty rectangular box with rounded corners, intended for writing notes. The box is outlined in black and occupies most of the page's vertical space.

As parents, one of our greatest fears is that our children will be bullied (or that they may become a bully themselves). We know that the majority of schools are working hard to prevent bullying, and deal with it well when it happens. However, it is often difficult to know what we can do as parents to keep our children safe from bullying, especially in this age of social media.

Between 15 and 25 children commit suicide every year because of bullying. It's up to all of us: schools, students, parents and carers to do something about it.

So how can we help? What can we advise our children to do if they see or experience bullying?

This comprehensive, invaluable parent guide (written by an Educational Psychologist and mother of four, now grown up, children) answers these questions and many more in a down-to-earth, practical and helpful manner – offering tried and tested tips and advice that will enable you to work with the school to make a real difference to your child's life. It includes:

- What bullying is and how it feels (as a target and as a parent)
- What schools are doing and why they don't just get rid of bullies!
- How you can keep your child safe from bullying – including cyber-bullying
- How to tell if your child is being bullied – getting your child to talk to you
- What to do if your child is being bullied – practical strategies for you and them
- What to do if you or your children know that bullying is going on (and why witnesses often don't tell)
- What to do if your child is bullying others (and why people bully)

About the author...

Julie Casey M.Ed., C.Psychol, has worked in education for thirty years, winning the national 'Teacher of the Year' award before becoming an Educational Psychologist. She has written a number of best-selling books for parents and teachers, and worked closely with the Government on many anti-bullying initiatives. She is a mother of four children, one of whom survived bullying throughout his school years. His story is told within.