

ADVICE TO PUPILS TO COPE WITH BULLYING

We all know that bullying goes on in every school but it's the way it's dealt with which makes the difference between life being tolerable or a misery. Bullies are very cunning and are expert at getting away with it.

Bullying includes

- People calling you names
- Making things up to get you into trouble
- Hitting, pinching, biting, pushing and shoving
- Taking things away from you
- Damaging your belongings
- Stealing your money
- Taking your friends away from you
- Spreading rumours
- Threats and intimidation
- Making silent or abusive phone calls
- Sending you offensive phone texts
- Posting insulting messages on the internet or by IM
- Bullies can also frighten you so that you don't want to go to school, so that you pretend to be ill to avoid them.

If you are being bullied, tell a friend, tell a teacher and tell your parents. It won't stop unless you do. It can be hard to do this so if you don't feel you can do it in person it might be easier to write a note to your parents explaining how you feel, or perhaps confide in someone outside the immediate family, like a grandparent, aunt, uncle or cousin and ask them to help you tell your parents what's going on.

Your form tutor needs to know what is going on so try to find a time to tell him/her when it won't be noticeable. You could stay behind on the pretext of needing help with some work. If you don't feel you can do that, then go to the medical room and speak to the school nurse.

The best idea is if a teacher can catch the bullies red-handed. That way, you won't get into bother from anyone for telling tales. It will be clear to everyone what has been going on. Don't be tempted to hit back because you could get hurt or get into trouble.

Try to stay in safe areas of the school at break and lunchtime where there are plenty of other people. Bullies don't like witnesses. If you are hurt at school, tell matron or a teacher immediately and ask for it to be written down. Make sure you tell your parents.

On the school bus, try to sit near the driver, or if it's an ordinary bus, by other adults. If you have to walk part of the way, and you're afraid of being ambushed, then vary your route, try to leave home and school a bit later or a bit earlier, or see if you can walk with other people who live near you, even if they're older or younger.

Many streets, shops and business premises now have CCTV so if you're attacked in the street the police may be able to get evidence.

If you see anyone else being bullied at your school, please tell someone about it. But don't get into trouble with the bullies, do it discreetly by telling a teacher when you get an opportunity and won't be overheard. People who are being bullied need friends so if you can help someone who is so unhappy please do so.

Bullying is very upsetting and if you feel you can't cope, tell your parents and go to see your doctor. Many doctors are very sympathetic about the effects of bullying and yours may be able to write a note for the school explaining the effect that bullying is having on your health.

You could think about judo or martial arts classes so that you are confident you can look after yourself if necessary.

Being bullied can make you feel very lonely and you might think you haven't got any friends. You're probably not the only one being bullied who has to spend break and lunch hour on your own. Keep your eyes open. If you see someone else on their own try to start a conversation, about anything, schoolwork, if you think you know their sister, if you think they might live near you, anything at all.

Sooner or later you'll find a genuine friend who likes you for yourself. Sometimes bullies will take your friends off you, perhaps your friends are afraid they'll also be bullied if they go around with you. It's always very upsetting when friends turn against you which is a good reason to try to get on with as many different people as you can, even those in different years.

If people are making nasty remarks about you then it may be because they are jealous. Perhaps you're better looking than they are or work harder or perhaps the teachers like you better. One way of dealing with remarks is simply to say ...yeah, whatever, each time so that you show them that it isn't having the effect of upsetting you in the way they think.

The bullies will have worked out what buttons to push to make you upset. They may make remarks about:

- Your weight
- Your looks
- The colour of your hair
- Your family
- Your schoolwork
- If you are popular
- If you work hard
- If you have a disability
- If you are a different religion, colour or culture
- If you wear spectacles or a hearing aid
- If you have dyslexia or dyspraxia
- If you've been off school due to illness

Bullying Online gets emails from pupils who have stopped eating because they've been called fat, or stupid because they have dyslexia. We've had a girl who tried to burn her freckles off because of cruel remarks. The thing all these pupils had in

common is that they were perfectly ordinary, nice people who had the misfortune to come up against a very nasty person.

If there's a ringleader then it's likely that other people who used to be your friends still like you, but they could be worried that if they go around with you they'll get bullied in the same way.

One thing you could do is have a word with each of them individually, at a time when nobody else is around, and just sound them out. You could try to get them into conversation about something like what they did at the weekend and then just say that you used to be friends with them and you're not sure why that changed. You may find that they're embarrassed and sheepish and don't really have an answer.

To have friends you also need to be a friend and you can do that by trying to be open and friendly with people and asking how they are. This isn't always easy because sometimes the people you are nice to aren't nice back, but if you just ask someone if they had a nice weekend then it gives them the chance to say something back and then you can try to continue the conversation.

People love talking about themselves so in time you'll find people who like doing that because you'll come across as a good listener and then people will enjoy your company and you'll find you have the same interests as some of these people which is the first step towards genuine friendship.

HI-TECH ABUSE

If you have a mobile phone, be careful who you give your number to. If you receive threatening or abusive phone calls or texts then tell your parents. It is a criminal offence to send offensive or threatening phone messages and if it continues, it can also amount to harassment. The police can, and do, take action. There's more on this subject in our section at http://www.bullying.co.uk/children/mobile_phone.htm.

Bullying Online has had numerous complaints about bullying on teenage website forums or message boards. We have successfully had a number of these boards shut down. If this is a problem for you then there's more advice in our section on internet safety on http://www.bullying.co.uk/children/internet_safety.htm

HAPPY SLAPPING

Happy slapping is the wrong description for an assault in which the attack is filmed. There's nothing happy about it, it's a bit like calling someone who steals a car and kills someone a 'joyrider'.

Bullying Online started to get complaints about happy slapping in November 2004. The first incidents took place in the London area, often on buses and trains, and quickly spread to the school playground and street.

The assault usually involves a stranger being hit over the head while other members of the gang take photographs/video on their camera phones. The pictures are then circulated by mobile phone or put on the internet. In recent months happy slapping

has become an unpleasant and dangerous craze in which many people have been hurt, some seriously. Where this has happened in school playgrounds pupils have been afraid to return to school. Anyone who thinks this is just a bit of harmless fun should think about the consequences because some of these attacks have been so violent that eventually someone will be killed.

Many of the people who have contacted us about the problem have been embarrassed and upset and thought their experience was an isolated incident until they saw Bullying Online talking about it on the Tonight with Trevor McDonald programme.

Anyone attacked in a happy slap assault should tell their parents who should make a complaint to the police. There are a number of offences involved. The first is assault, the second is harassment if the pictures are shown around and uploaded to the internet and it may also be against telecommunications law.

Some schools have already banned mobile phones from being used during the day to prevent pupils sending abusive text messages. We're now hearing of others banning them after happy slapping incidents. It's unfortunate that the bad behaviour of a tiny minority of pupils inconveniences everyone but if head teachers think there is a risk of assaults on the premises then they need to protect pupils and a ban on phones on the premises is probably the best way to do that

BODY LANGUAGE

Think about the last time you walked into school. How did you feel? Confident and powerful? Or timid and worried?

And how did you look to other people? Were you striding out purposefully with your head up, looking forward, or were you trying to make yourself look insignificant in the hope that the bullies wouldn't spot you?

Body language tells us a lot about other people. If you're trying not to be noticed and looking at the ground a lot while darting into school it can make you more noticeable. You look defensive and vulnerable.

If you step out boldly you send out a quite different message of confidence, as though you're the sort of person who might answer back if the bully tries a smart remark. You may not be very confident but you'll certainly look it.

TAKING TIME OFF SCHOOL

Sometimes, when you're very unhappy you might want to stay at home to avoid the bullies because you're afraid of what they might do to you. Always tell your parents how upset you are so that they can help you. You need their support.

Every day you go in to school is a triumph over the bullies because by being there you're showing them that you have every right to be there and that their behaviour hasn't upset you as they'd hoped.

The problem is that if you start taking days off then you can quickly fall behind with work and that makes life more stressful as well as possibly affecting your exam results and your future.

Unfortunately, taking time off school without being genuinely ill is considered to be an unauthorised absence or truancy and your parents could end up being prosecuted for it.

Luckily, council education departments have people who can help in this situation called education welfare officers (education social workers) and they can often make a big difference so that pupils can get back into school quickly and with the support they need.

MOVING TO A NEW SCHOOL

You might think that it would be a good idea to move to a new school if you're being bullied but the reality is that there is bullying in all schools, although some deal with it better than others.

All the best schools are already full and if you think that you will get preferential treatment because you're being bullied, or not attending school due to bullying, then that isn't the case.

You may end up being allocated to a less popular school and less popular often means poorer exam results and discipline problems.

There are often long waiting lists for the best schools and although your parents can appeal to the LEA for a place, there's no guarantee you would get one.

Other things to consider are:

- The new school may be further away and inconvenient and expensive to get to
- The cost of the new uniform
- It may be difficult to settle into a class where everyone already has friends
- The school may use a different exam board so the coursework could be different
- The bullies may have friends at the new school

ASK FOR HELP

Sometimes bullying can make you feel very unhappy and upset and that life isn't worth living but you will come through it. Bullying Online is here to help you 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. You can email us on help@bullying.co.uk at any time.

Pupils being bullied often email us from school. If you don't have a home computer, you are welcome to email us from school with your home address for a written reply.

SAMARITANS: If you're being bullied and feel you can't cope any longer and want to speak to someone about it then contact Samaritans. You can email them at jo@samaritans.org , phone them on 08457 90 90 90 in the UK and 1850 60 90 90 in Republic of Ireland or you can find your nearest branch in your phone book. Visit: www.samaritans.org for more information.

Many local councils have drop-in centres or other youth services staffed by trained counsellors so look in your phone book under the name of your county or metropolitan council to see what's available in your area.

If you're aged 13-19 and live in England you can also get a Connexions personal adviser through school or you can contact someone locally yourself. We can help you find your nearest office. These are in most big towns and you can phone to make an appointment to see a counsellor. We can help you to find your nearest Connexions branch.

There are other places where you can get help on our links page.

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