

Bullying - how to cope

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No-one has to put up with bullying. Bullying makes you feel miserable, sad, angry and worthless.

And bullying does not necessarily end when you leave school. At college, university and in the workplace, victimisation is still a major problem.

Adults and young people who are bullied often blame themselves and are afraid to go to work or study or appear in public places.

Self-blame and feelings of inadequacy can prevent victims of bullying from speaking up for themselves or telling anyone else about what is going on.

What can you do if you are being bullied?

Non-confrontational approach

If you do nothing, no one will find anything out and the bully will not get into trouble. You won't be seen as a 'dobber' or a 'grass' and your reputation won't suffer any further.

However, if the bully is not told how much damage he/she is doing, he/she will probably continue unabated.

If you do decide to keep quiet, you should keep a diary of what is happening to you. Write down exactly what happens - when and where, who is involved, etc. Write down the names of any witnesses.

You could avoid places where you are bullied. If it is at lunch, for example, try to find a place where you can be safe, like the library. If it happens during a class or supervision, move your seat. If it happens on a bus, catch an earlier one or a later one.

Try to find other people to be with. You are more likely to be picked on if you are on your own.

Talk to other people in your group about the treatment you are getting. Have they seen it happening? What do they think? Is it happening to them? Is there something you could do as a pair or a group to protect each other?

Go to a gym and join an aerobics class or workout. Join a martial arts or a kick boxing class. Getting fit does a number of things. It makes you feel better about yourself. It will make you stronger and fitter so that you don't feel so defenceless and it will teach you invaluable skills about looking after yourself.

Confronting a bully

Bullies are often unaware of the psychological impact they have on you. So why not try telling them?

You could tell them alone or with a friend. **Try not to get angry.** Write down what you are going to say. Try to tell them this in a calm but firm way. Be polite and dignified.

It is probably better to talk to the bully when they are on their own, and not in front of their friends, because they might well get defensive, act cool, or deny having behaved in that way.

Sometimes it may be better to get someone else to do the telling because they are less emotionally involved than you are. You could ask a friend of yours, a friend of the bully, or an older student.

If you prefer to put your thoughts on paper rather than talk to the bully face to face, this might solve the problem. Writing down feelings so that the bully can read them might make the him/her realise how unhappy their behaviour makes you feel.

Sometimes none of these options will work or seem feasible to you. The only remaining, and frequently the most effective, strategy is to **confide in a figure of authority** and ask them to deal with it. This person could be your tutor or a more senior figure.

Not all figures of authority will have the will or the strength to tackle bullying. Some see it as a personal slight on their abilities or their institution. If you feel that the person you have placed your trust in has not helped or is not sufficiently aware of your discomfort, appeal to them again, or write down all your feelings in a letter. If the problem is still ignored, then go to another figure of authority, or ask your parents to write a letter too.

If bullying is allowed to escalate it can affect your study, your career and your social life. **Try to be strong**, even though you might feel isolated. Above all, have faith in human nature – there is always someone out there who will help you.

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