

## AREA TITLE: PARENTS

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### AREA TITLE: BULLYING

#### About.. **What is bullying?**

Last year over 20,000 children and young people called ChildLine about bullying, making it the most common problem the helpline dealt with. Children on the autism spectrum are more likely to experience bullying, and more likely to bully others.

Research from the National Autistic Society in their report *B is for Bullied* shows that 40% of children on the autism spectrum have been bullied. Behaviour which is at odds with that of the peer group may lead to a child being picked on. A child on the autism spectrum may choose to play by themselves in the playground which makes them more vulnerable to bullying than those with a group of friends around them. Unusual behaviour, such as hand flapping or inappropriate speech, may attract the attention of bullies. Moreover, children on the autism spectrum are less able to pick up on cues in social interaction, making it difficult for them to interpret bullying behaviour for what it is.

The Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) advises that each school consults with pupils and teachers to draw up its own definition of bullying in its bullying policy. However, it gives a broad definition of bullying as behaviour which is deliberately hurtful (or aggressive), repeated often over a period of time, and difficult for victims to defend themselves against. DCSF describes three main types of bullying: physical (hitting, kicking, taking belongings), verbal (name-calling, insulting, making offensive remarks), indirect (spreading nasty stories about someone, exclusion from social groups, being made the subject of malicious rumours, sending malicious e-mails or text messages).

Many children find it difficult to tell their parents that they are being bullied. This problem can be compounded for the parents of a child on the autism spectrum who is being bullied, as they may not have the skills to interpret what has happened to them, or to communicate it clearly. However, bullying has a detrimental effect on the well-being of children on the autism spectrum, especially if it compounds difficulties they are already experiencing at school. 56% of parents of children on the autism spectrum who had been bullied said that it had caused their child to miss school or even change schools

The UK charity Kidscape offers some useful pointers for parents who are worried that their child may be experiencing bullying at school. The web page (link) lists behaviours such as coming home with clothes or books destroyed, or beginning to bully other siblings, that may be an indication that something is wrong.  
(<http://www.kidscape.org.uk/parents/signsof.shtml>)

#### **What should you do?**

A parent's first reaction to finding that their child is being bullied at school may be to march in and confront teachers, or to collar the bully or their parents directly. However, a more effective approach is to gather a history of the bullying behaviour by recording events in a diary over a few weeks, and then to make an appointment to talk to the class teacher to raise concerns. Ask to see the school bullying policy which may outline some strategies for dealing with the problem.

If this does not solve the problem, and many parents and children on the autism spectrum find that it does not, you may need to see the head of year and/or make an appointment to see the headteacher.

The National Autistic Society suggests some approaches and resources that may help your child deal with the situation, as well as outlining some strategies that the school

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could adopt. The NAS website has a series of very useful pages offering information to parents who suspect that their child is being bullied. These can be found at <http://www.autism.org.uk/nas/jsp/polopoly.jsp?d=1129>.

There are a number of other organisations set up to help children and their parents deal with bullying. Kidscape offers a website and a telephone helpline, as well as providing training for children, parents and professionals. It has a training guide for teachers of children with special needs called *Dealing with Bullying* which may be useful resource to recommend to your child's teacher.

The Anti-Bullying Alliance (ABA) brings together over 50 organisations into one network working to reduce bullying. Its report *Tackling Bullying in Schools* covers the most widely used approaches used in schools to deal with bullying. ([http://www.anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk/Page.asp?originx\\_9254ol\\_194878102596q69l\\_200711211145r](http://www.anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk/Page.asp?originx_9254ol_194878102596q69l_200711211145r)). It also offers a briefing, *Bullying and Disability*, looking at the problems faced by children with a disability and bullying. ([http://www.anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk/downloads/pdf/spotlight\\_brief\\_issue9.pdf](http://www.anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk/downloads/pdf/spotlight_brief_issue9.pdf)). The ABA also provides a useful list of helplines for websites for parents seeking further information on dealing with bullying.

The DCSF has produced an anti-bullying pack for schools titled *Don't Suffer in Silence*. This can be downloaded from the Teachernet website and in Part five contains advice for parents. Additionally *Safe to Learn: embedding anti-bullying work in schools* is the new overarching anti-bullying guidance for schools from the DCSF, and includes specialist advice on cyber bullying and bullying involving children with special educational needs and disabilities. This can also be found on Teachernet, and contains a substantial list of useful organisations and resources for further information on bullying.

Other organisations offering help for parents of children who are being bullied can be found in the help section below.

**Get help from...** **Kidscape 020 7730 3300** UK wide charity committed to keeping children safe from abuse. Offers a helpline for parents and guardians, online advice for children and parents and carers and training for those working with children.

**Bullying UK** A web based charity set up by a parent and her son with direct experience of bullying. The website gives lots of advice and information about how to combat bullying at school and other situations.

#### **Bullying: a guide for parents**

Author: the National Autistic Society

<http://www.autism.org.uk/nas/jsp/polopoly.jsp?d=1129>

#### **The Anti-Bullying Alliance**

<http://www.anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk>

**Teachernet** (Government website for teachers)

<http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/wholeschool/behaviour/tacklingbullying/>

**Parentline Plus** offers information for parents about bullying

<http://www.parentlineplus.org.uk/index.php?id=9>

**The Advisory Centre for Education** offers an independent advice service for parents by phone text or e-mail.

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Tel: 0808 800 5793  
<http://www.ace-ed.org.uk>

**The Children's Legal Centre** offers advice and information on education and the law, and provides an Education Law Advice Line  
Tel: 0845 345 4345  
<http://www.childrenslegalcentre.com/>

## Links

### **Tackling Bullying - listening to the views of children and young people**

Author: Christine Oliver and Mano Candappa

Published by: The Thomas Coram Research Unit, The Institute of Education, University of London

Date: 2003

### **Bullying: Don't suffer in Silence**

<http://publications.teachernet.gov.uk/default.aspx?PageFunction=downloadoptions&PageMode=publications&ProductId=DfES%200064%202000&>

Author: The Department for Children, Schools and Families, Published by Teachernet: Online publications for schools, 2000

### **Safe to Learn: Embedding anti-bullying work in schools**

Author: The Department for Children, Schools and Families, Published by: Teachernet: Online publications for schools, 2007

### **Bullying involving children with special educational needs and disabilities**

Author: The Department for Children, Schools and Families, Published by: Teachernet: Online publications for schools, 2008

### **B is for Bullied: the experiences of children with autism and their families**

Author: the National Autistic Society

<http://www.autism.org.uk/content/1/c6/01/18/57/bullying.pdf>

### **BBC Chatguide**

Advice for parents on what to do if your child is being bullied 'virtually' for example via mobile phone or chat room.

[www.bbc.co.uk/chatguide/glossary/bully.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/chatguide/glossary/bully.shtml)

**Case Studies** **Bullying - Ask Doc** A real life question about bullying from Keith, aged 10 on the Children First for Health website

**Bullying and self harm by Zara, age 15** A real life story about bullying and the consequences for 15 year old Zara

**Bullying - by Sarah** A real life story about bullying from Sarah

**Department for Children, Schools and Families** – case studies about how some schools have successfully tackled bullying

**National Autistic Society - Make School Make Sense for Me** – children and young people with autism speak about their experiences of school

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