

A Parent's Guide to Complaining to your School about Bullying

THE
STOP CAMPAIGN

PREVENTING AND TACKLING **BULLYING** IN DERBYSHIRE

 **DERBYSHIRE**
County Council

Advice and support for you and your family if your child is being bullied.

Bullying is when someone is deliberately hurtful to someone over a period of time. The person being bullied usually finds it difficult to defend themselves. There are different ways of bullying, but these are the main ones:

- physical: hitting, kicking, taking belongings
- verbal: name calling, insulting, making offensive remarks
- indirect: spreading nasty rumours about someone, not including them in social groups

Bullying relating to prejudice and difference

Many children and adults are bullied because they are seen to be 'different'. This is referred to as prejudice-driven bullying. It may be that your child is seen as different because of their race, religion or culture, sexuality, gender or because of any special educational needs or disabilities they may have.

Some children are singled out by bullies because they are overweight, affluent, deprived, in care or young carers themselves, or for a variety of other reasons. Sometimes the person bullying cannot even explain the reasons - they just perceive their target as 'different'.

Are you worried your child is being bullied?

Bullying is a serious problem and can be very upsetting for both you and your child. Children may find it hard to talk about being bullied or bullying others. You may not be sure that your child is being bullied, but there are some signs that may suggest there is a problem. Look out for:

- excuses to miss school, such as stomach complaints or headaches (or your child may be skipping school altogether)
- torn clothes, school things that are missing or broken or lost money
- more bruises or scrapes than usual
- signs of stress - being moody/silent or crying, or bullying a younger sibling or friend
- bed wetting (in younger children)
- a change in eating habits.

There could be other reasons for these symptoms, so don't jump to conclusions. Is there anything else bothering your child?

What do I do if I have a concern or complaint about bullying at my child's school?

If you have a concern it is important that you raise this with your child's school as soon as possible. Set out below are the steps you should take.

What to do first

Most concerns can be sorted out quickly by speaking with your child's class or form teacher or, in the case of secondary schools, the Head of Year. The school administrator will be able to help you contact the right person.

It can be difficult to remain calm when you feel your child's rights have been violated. But avoid allowing anger and frustration to affect your interaction with school staff. If you become angry the meeting will be cancelled and you will be asked to leave the premises.

If you have a concern which you feel should be looked at by the Headteacher, you can contact him or her straightaway if you prefer. It is usually best to discuss the problem face to face so you may need to make an appointment by contacting the school office. You can take a friend or relative to the meeting if you wish.

If you are still concerned

If you are still concerned following your meeting, you can make a formal complaint to the Headteacher. This should be done in writing in line with the school's complaints policy. The Headteacher will contact you to discuss the problem and you will usually be invited to a meeting to discuss this further. The Headteacher will then conduct a full investigation of the complaint and may interview any members of staff or pupils concerned. You will receive a written response to your complaint.

If you are still unhappy

If you are still not satisfied, you may wish to make a formal complaint to the governing body. You should write to the Chair of Governors of the school. He or she will try to see if there is a way forward. If he or she is unable to resolve the matter, your complaint will then be heard by a committee of three governors called the Complaints Review Committee. They will have no prior knowledge of the case and will therefore be able to make a fresh, unbiased assessment. You will be invited to attend the committee meeting, accompanied by a friend or relative if you wish, and to put your side of the matter. The Headteacher will also attend to give his or her account. More information on how these meetings are conducted is contained in the school's complaints procedure.

Is there any further action I can take?

Complaints about school problems are usually settled within the school but in exceptional cases it may be possible to refer the matter to an outside body such as the Local Authority, OFSTED or the Secretary of State for Education and Skills. If necessary, the Chair of the Complaints Review Committee will let you have further information.

Local Authority

The Local Authority will only look at bullying complaints if you have followed the complaints procedure of the school. The role of the Local Authority for bullying complaints is advisory and the Local Authority has no power to instruct the school to implement a decision. The Local Authority will investigate the complaint by speaking to all parties involved. If there is evidence that a bullying incident took place they will, if applicable mediate between the victim and perpetrator in a restorative meeting.

You can contact Derbyshire County Council through our website, through our contact Centre, Call Derbyshire or by writing to us.

Online enquiries

You can make general enquiries to us online by using our web form or by emailing contact.centre@derbyshire.gov.uk

Call Derbyshire

You can contact Call Derbyshire on 08 456 058 058.

We are open 8am to 8pm Monday to Friday and 9.30am to 4pm Saturdays.

You can write to us at:

Derbyshire County Council
County Hall
Matlock
DE4 3AG

OFSTED

OFSTED do not look at complaints unless the school complaints process has been fully explored. OFSTED do not normally investigate individual complaints, however they do try to provide support regarding complaints.

OFSTED are **NOT** in a position to :

- investigate incidents that are alleged to have taken place
- judge how well a school investigated or responded to a complaint
- mediate between a parent and a school to resolve a dispute

Below are generic letter templates for the Headteacher and the Chair of Governors.

Dear (Headteachers name),

(date)

I have been dealing with (teachers name) over the bullying of my son/daughter by (...). Despite discussing this with the class teacher/head of year, bullying is still going on.

Can you please let me know what strategy you can introduce to resolve this problem and how it will be monitored? Is it possible for you to increase supervision at the time most of the bullying happens (at break/ in the playground/ in the corridor/ in the changing room).

Can I please have a copy of the school bullying policy? Please put a copy of my complaint onto (name of child) file together with your written response.

Yours sincerely,

<Your Name>

Letter to the Chair of Governors

(get his/her name from the school secretary and send the letter to the school address).

Dear (...),

(date)

I enclose a copy of a letter I sent to the head teacher of (...) School on (date). Unfortunately, despite writing to the class teacher/head of year and the head teacher, my son/daughter is still being bullied by (...).

As you will see, I have asked the head what strategy he can introduce to stop the bullying (I am not satisfied with his/her reply/ the bullying has continued). Please investigate my complaint and tell me what steps the governors intend to take to halt the bullying of my son/daughter.

As this matter is unresolved I'd like a copy of son/daughters school record to see what action has been taken on my earlier complaints. I understand that I will be asked to pay for photocopying should there be a charge.

Yours sincerely,

<Your Name>

Support for you and your child

Bullying can have a distressing effect on children and their families. Whether your child is being bullied or is bullying others, you may want support to help you deal with this. There are many organisations, local and national that offer free advice and support, please see below.

Bullying relating to prejudice and difference

Family Lives

The Family Lives leaflet [bullying - prejudice and difference \(pdf format, 326 KB\)](#) gives detailed advice about to help your child if they are being bullied or bullying others and who to contact for further help.

Don't stick it

www.dontstickit.org.uk is a website for young people with learning difficulties with advice for their parents or carers.

Contact a family

www.cafamily.org.uk is an organisation for parent/carers of disabled children which provides a free helpline for parents and families (0808 808 3555) and a leaflet - [guide to dealing with bullying for parents of disabled children \(pdf format, 572 KB\)](#).

Disability discrimination

If your child has a diagnosed disability and has been bullied, the school should take this into account when dealing with the problem.

If you feel the school hasn't done this you can get further advice about disability discrimination and how to deal with it by contacting the Equality and Human Rights Commission Helpline on 0845 604 6610 or visiting www.equalityandhumanrights.com for information.

Derbyshire Parent Partnership

Parent Partnerships provide free and impartial information, support and advice to parents of children with special education needs and disabilities (ages 0-19). Contact them on 01629 533660 or <http://www.derbyshireparentpartnership.co.uk/leaflets-letters.php>

Cyberbullying

Bullying via the Internet or mobile phone is known as cyberbullying. Young people rely on their phones and the Internet to chat and stay in touch with their friends and need to be aware of how to stay safe. Parents can help by understanding the risks and supporting their children.

Thinkuknow

www.thinkuknow.co.uk is a website promoting safe use of the Internet, providing advice on a number of issues, including cyberbullying. In some circumstances it provides the option to report abuse directly to the police via the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre www.ceop.gov.uk.

Childnet

www.childnet.com is an international, non-profit making organisation working to “help make the Internet a great and safe place for children”. Childnet provide advice for parents and young people.

Cybermentors

Beatbullying have developed the Cybermentors peer support programme for young people affected by cyberbullying. Visit www.beatbullying.org.

Childline

Childline helpline: 0800 1111. Counsellors are always there to listen. Last year bullying was the most common reason children called. Advice is also available on their website at www.childline.org.uk/Explore/Bullying/Pages/Bullyinginfo.aspx.

Advisory Centre for Education

The Advisory Centre for Education provide advice for parents and children on all school matters. Contact them on 0808 800 5793 or visit www.ace-ed.org.uk. They provide a free leaflet for parents called [tackling bullying](#).

Children's Legal Centre

The Children's Legal Centre provides free legal advice on all aspects of the law affecting children and young people including bullying. Contact them on 01206 873820 or visit www.childrenslegalcentre.com.

Anti-Bullying Alliance

The Anti-Bullying Alliance (ABA): Founded in 2002 by NSPCC and National Children's Bureau, the Anti-Bullying Alliance (ABA) brings together over 100 organisations into one network to develop and share good practice across the whole range of bullying issues. They have information and advice for both parents/carers and young people. Visit www.anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk.

Beatbullying

Beatbullying is a bullying prevention charity with an emphasis on working directly with children and young people. In addition to lesson plans and resources for parents, Beatbullying have developed the Cybermentors peer support programme for young people affected by cyberbullying. Visit www.beatbullying.org.

Kidscape

Kidscape is a charity established to prevent bullying and promote child protection. They give advice for young people, professionals and parents about different types of bullying and how to tackle it. They also offer specialist training and support for school staff and assertiveness training for young people. Visit www.kidscape.org.uk.