

# Anti-Bullying Guidance for Foster Carers

## SCOPE OF THIS CHAPTER

Bullying can disrupt a child or young person's personal, social and educational achievement. The following guidance is provided to:

- Ensure that Foster Carers and Social Workers understand what bullying is and the impact it can have on a child/young person's life;
- Give advice and guidance on how best to deal with situations where bullying is occurring.

Bullying takes place in a variety of environments including home, schools and in the community therefore the following advice and guidance should be considered regardless of where the incident has occurred.

The carers own children or fostered children may be subject to bullying or may bully themselves.

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## 1. Definition of Bullying

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Bullying is defined as deliberately hurtful behaviour, repeated over a period of time, where it is difficult for those being bullied to defend themselves. It can take many forms but the three main types are, physical (e.g. hitting, kicking, theft), verbal (e.g. name calling, racist remarks) or indirect (e.g. spreading rumours, excluding someone from special groups).

Single incidents of verbal or physical attack and behaviour which is hurtful but not intentional, must also be taken seriously and dealt with according to the principles outlined in this guidance.

These are some of the ways that children and young people have described as bullying:

- Being called names;

- Being persistently teased or ridiculed;
- Being pushed or pulled about;
- Being hit or attacked;
- Being intimidated by being sworn at, shouted at, treated aggressively in a number of ways including threatening looks over a period of time;
- Having possessions taken and thrown about;
- Having rumours spread about you;
- Being ignored and left out;
- Being forced to hand over money or possessions;
- Being attacked because of your religion, race or colour, disability, gender or sexuality;
- Being sent threatening notes, e-mails or text messages;
- Gang pressure;
- Being taken advantage of; e.g. my sweets for your watch.

The effect of bullying can be made worse by the contribution of bystander/collusive behaviour. This can happen by:

- Choosing to ignore or deny that a bullying incident has happened;
- Witnessing an incident but supporting the bullying or refusing to report it;
- Being informed that an incident has occurred but do nothing about it;
- Failing to report that a young person has committed or been accused of or implicated in an incident.

## **2. Dealing with Bullying**

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Foster Carers and their families have an important part to play in helping to deal with bullying.

1. Discourage any children in your care from using bullying behaviour at home or elsewhere. Show how to resolve difficult situations without using violence or aggression.
2. If any child you care for is being bullied/bullying at school, ask to see the school's anti-bullying policy. Each school must have an anti-bullying policy, which sets out how to deal with incidents of bullying. Carers and parents have a right to know about this policy, which is as much for parents/carers as for staff and pupils.

3. If if any child you care for is being bullied at an activity or children's club ask to speak to the organiser and check that they have an anti-bullying policy.
4. Watch out for signs that any child you care for is being bullied, or is bullying others. Foster Carers are often the first to detect symptoms of bullying.

Common symptoms include:

- Headaches;
- Stomach-aches;
- Anxiety and irritability;
- Fear of walking to or from school;
- Unwilling to go to school or specific activities;
- Sudden changes in routine behaviour;
- Has 'lost' personal possessions or they are damaged;
- Asking for increased dinner money/pocket money;
- Starting to take money/belongings from other family members.

It can be helpful to ask questions about progress and friends at school; how break times and lunchtimes are spent; and whether the child you care for is facing problems or difficulties at school. Don't dismiss negative signs. Don't assume that bullying only takes place at school. Explore other possibilities e.g. in the community or the home.

If a child in your care has been bullied:

- Calmly talk to the child about it;
- All incidents of bullying should be formally recorded and a copy of the recording passed on to the child's social worker as soon as possible;
- Make a note of what the child says - particularly who was said to be involved; how often the bullying has occurred; where it happened and what has happened;
- Reassure the child that telling you about the bullying was the right thing to do;
- Explain that any further incidents that occur in school should be reported to a teacher immediately;
- Make sure that the child's social worker is informed of the situation;
- In extreme cases counselling for the child or young person may be seen as helpful.

### **3. Roles and Responsibilities**

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All incidents of bullying should be immediately discussed with the child's social worker. Consideration must be given to:

- Where has the bullying incident taken place if it is other than in school?
- Dependent on the situation and who is involved who is the best person to deal with the situation, Foster Carer, parent, Social Worker or is there someone else more appropriate?
- Does the child/young person wish to discuss this with someone other than his Foster Carers, parent or Social Worker?
- How is the child/young person going to be supported and given possible advice on how to handle the situation?
- Do any other professionals need to be involved?
- Teaching the child/young person assertiveness skills and having the right to say no.

### **4. If the child you care for is being accused of bullying**

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People bully for lots of reasons. This could be that:

- They have family problems;
- They are being bullied themselves;
- They are being abused;
- They feel unimportant;
- To gain acceptance;
- They have heard other people being called names;
- To belong to a particular group or gang;
- They are selfish and always want to get their own way;
- They don't know it is wrong;
- They are copying older brothers or sister or other people in the family they admire;
- They haven't learnt other, better ways of mixing with their school friends. Their friends encourage them to bully;
- They are going through a difficult time and are acting out aggressive feelings.

All forms of bullying should be challenged immediately. Discuss with the Social Worker for the child how the situation can best be dealt with.

- The child/young person should be encouraged to apologise to the victim of the bullying and helped to think of ways of making things better;
- It is important to try and work out with the child/young person why they are bullying and how to make things better for them;
- Consider anger management techniques;
- Consider direct work as appropriate;
- The child/young person should be encouraged to consider responses and other ways of behaving where they will not feel like they are losing face;
- Any repeated incidents of bullying and how they have been dealt with should be recorded by both Foster Care and Social Worker and kept under review until everyone including the child feel that this is no longer a cause for concern;
- Mobile and text message bullying. If you or someone you know is receiving text or calls that upset or offend, your network provider should have a number that you can call to bar or report calls.

## **5. Monitoring incidents of bullying**

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Incidents of bullying will be monitored by:

- Foster Carers reporting specific incidents to the child's Social Worker.
- Fostering Social Workers undertake regular visits to and supervision of Foster Carers. On such visits, the Fostering Social Worker will ask Foster Carers about any incidents of bullying involving children placed with them. Incidents reported will be recorded on the Record of Supervision.

## **6. Useful names and numbers**

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- NYAS National Youth Advocacy Service and Children's Rights: Freephone  
Tel: 0808 808 1001
- Anti-Bullying: Campaign, Tel: 0207 3781446 (9.30-5.00) Advice line for parents and children
- Kidscape: Has a wide range of publications for young people, parents and teachers Bullying-Counsellors available Monday - Friday 10.00am - 4.00pm.  
Tel: 020 7730 3300
- Childline: Free 24 hour Helpline for children 0800 1111
- Family Lives. Free confidential Helpline for anyone looking after a child  
Tel: 0808 800 2222