

BULLYING

People who are bullied often feel that they are all alone and think there is nothing they can do to change the situation. Ongoing bullying is of great concern. It can lower a person's self-esteem and lead to feelings of sadness, depression, anger and confusion. If you are being bullied, remind yourself that it's not your fault and that there is something you can do to stop it. The best place to start is to talk to people you trust – friends, family and teachers – about what is happening to you and to discuss with them some ways of dealing with the problem.

WHAT IS BULLYING?

Bullying can be:

- **Verbal:** including name calling or put downs, threats, teasing and sexual harassment – even if it is done in an indirect or suggestive way. This can also take place online or through mobile phone text messages.
- **Physical:** including being punched, tripped, kicked or having your belongings stolen or damaged.
- **Social:** including being left out or ignored, or having rumours spread about you. This type of bullying is very common.
- **Psychological:** this is often less obvious or direct than other forms of bullying. You might be given dirty looks, be stalked or made to feel intimidated.
- **Cyber-bullying:** this is a form of bullying which takes place online, for example via email, chat rooms, discussion groups, online social networking, instant messaging or web pages. This can also take place via mobile phone text messages.

WHAT ARE THE CONSEQUENCES OF BEING BULLIED?

One of the most painful aspects of bullying is that it is relentless. When it goes on and on, bullying can put a person in a state of constant fear. Studies show that people who are abused by their peers are at risk for mental health problems, such as low self-esteem, stress, depression, or anxiety. They may also think about suicide more.

WHO ARE BULLIES?

Bullying can be done by an individual person or by a group of people. Anyone can be a bully, including a friend, your boyfriend or girlfriend, brother or sister, or another family member. A bully can also be an older person, or someone in a position of power such as a teacher, parent or boss.

WHAT ARE THE CHARACTERISTICS OF BULLIES?

Bullies may be outgoing and aggressive or appear reserved on the surface. They may manipulate people in subtle, deceptive ways, like anonymously starting a damaging rumor just to see what happens.

Many bullies share some **common characteristics**. They like to dominate others to make themselves feel more interesting or powerful. They are generally focused on themselves. They often have poor social skills and poor social judgment. Sometimes they have no feelings of empathy or caring toward other people. Some bullies act the way they do because they've been hurt by bullies in the past — maybe even a bullying figure in their own family, like a parent or other adult. Understanding what makes bullies tick can help you to counteract their behaviour.

WHAT TO DO IF YOU ARE THE VICTIM OF BULLYING?

➤ SELF HELP

Ignore the bully and walk away. Don't take the bait. Bullies are looking for a reaction and often lose interest if they don't get one.

Body language. Using assertive body language sends a message that you're not vulnerable. Keep your head held high and walk away.

Hold the anger. Anger is exactly the response he or she is trying to get. Bullies want to know they have control over your emotions. If you're in a situation where you have to deal with a bully and you can't walk away with poise, try and use humour — it can throw the bully off guard.

Don't get physical. Do not use physical force (like kicking, hitting, or pushing). Not only are you showing your anger, you can never be sure what the bully will do in response. Stand up for yourself in other ways, such as gaining control of the situation by walking away or by being assertive in your actions.

Stay with others. Stick to areas where you feel safe and hang out with people you trust. The person who is bullying you won't pick on you as much when there are other people around.

Keep out of the bully's way. It might be possible for you to avoid the person who is bullying you, for example by travelling a different way to school, or avoiding the places that he/she hangs out.

Practice confidence. Think of all the things you do well and try not to let the bullying affect your confidence. Think positive thoughts about yourself.

Take charge of your life. If you lack confidence, then try and gain confidence by becoming good at something that you enjoy. If you feel your best — and your strongest — other kids may give up teasing. Exercise, practice a martial art or yoga, learn a skill like art or music. Join a class, club or gym — you'll make new friends and become more confident.

➤ EXTERNAL HELP

Ask for help. If the bullying doesn't stop, you might find it helpful to ask someone else for advice. You should also report it to someone in charge — either at school or at work.

Talk about it. It may help to talk to a guidance counselor, teacher, or friend — anyone who can give you the support you need. Talking can be a good outlet for the fears and frustrations that can build when you're being bullied. Your support person will also be able to suggest ways to deal with the situations you hadn't considered.