



Information for parents and carers on bullying

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Red Balloon
LEARNER CENTRES
For the recovery of bullied children



NATIONAL CENTRE FOR SOCIAL RESEARCH, FOR RED BALLOON



16,000 11-15 year olds are absent from school at any one time due to bullying.



Information for parents and carers on bullying

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Bullying can be physical, verbal or psychological. It can happen face-to-face or through cyberspace.



What is bullying?

Whilst there is no legal definition of bullying the Government defines bullying as:

“Behaviour by an individual or group, [usually] repeated over time that intentionally hurts another individual or group either physically or emotionally.”

(Preventing and tackling bullying: Advice for headteachers, staff and governing bodies DfE March 2014)

The Anti-Bullying Alliance defines bullying as:

“The repetitive, intentional hurting of one person or group by another person or group, where the relationship involves an imbalance of power. Bullying can be physical, verbal or psychological. It can happen face-to-face or through cyberspace.”

Bullying can happen anywhere, at any time, and can be verbal, physical or psychological. Bullying can take many forms, including hitting, shoving, poking, taunting, mocking, humiliating, threatening, bribing, name-calling, making offensive comments, stealing or taking and hiding personal possessions, sending unkind messages, throwing things, telling untrue or unkind tales about people, ostracism and spreading malicious rumours (this is not an exclusive list).

Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying is any bullying behaviour that takes place ‘virtually’ via mobile devices like phones and tablets, through online social networks such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, and is also common on gaming sites. Cyberbullying can happen in or outside school – whenever and wherever children have access to phones or the internet. Examples of this kind of behaviour include inappropriate text messaging, e-mailing or blogging, sending offensive or degrading images by phone or via the internet, excluding individuals from group chat and creating false personas to mock or humiliate others.

There is strong expectation from government that teachers will tackle all forms of bullying, including cyberbullying, and in recent years they have extended powers such as the specific power to search for and delete inappropriate images/files on electronic devices, including mobile phones.

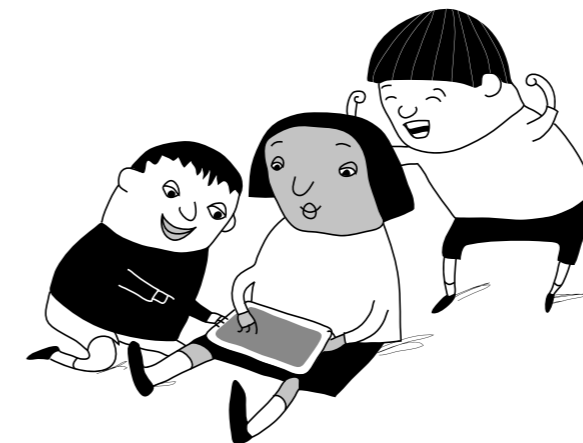
Bullying outside school

Bullying outside school is any incident of bullying that occurs anywhere off the school premises, such as on school or public transport, outside the local shops, in the town or village centre or cyberbullying.

Headteachers of relevant schools¹ have the legal power to discipline their pupils for bullying incidents that occur outside of schools premises, as described above. The headteacher is only permitted to discipline the pupil to a reasonable extent, in line with the school’s discipline policy.

The Department for Education’s guidance for preventing and tackling bullying states that **“where bullying outside the school is reported to school staff, it should be investigated and acted on.”**

The guidance also states that the headteacher of your child’s school should also consider whether it is appropriate to notify the police or anti-social behaviour co-ordinator in your local authority about the incident. Please note that if the misbehaviour could be criminal or poses a serious threat to a member of the public, the police should always be informed.



¹ ‘A relevant school’ means: a community, foundation or voluntary school, a community or foundation special school, a maintained nursery school, a pupil referral unit, or a school approved by the secretary of state. Section 89 (5) Education and Inspections Act 2006.

To find out more about this you can view the Department for Education’s guidance - ‘Preventing and Tackling Bullying’, which can be found by visiting www.DfE.gov.uk



What are schools' responsibilities?

All schools:

- Your child's school is required by law to determine measures to encourage and promote good behaviour and prevent all forms of bullying amongst pupils.²
- By law, all maintained schools (not Academies, Free Schools or Independent Schools) must have a behaviour policy in place that includes measures to prevent all forms of bullying among pupils. This policy is decided by the school. All teachers, pupils and parents must be told what it is.
- If you have not been provided a copy, or know where to locate a copy of the Anti-Bullying Policy or Behaviour Policy ask the school administrator or secretary for a copy.
- Your child's school must make arrangements for ensuring they exercise their functions with a view to "safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children who are pupils at the school". This means that the school may need to address bullying as a child protection concern, "where there is reasonable cause to suspect that a child is suffering or is likely to suffer significant harm".³
- All schools (including Academies, Free Schools and Independent Schools) must also follow **anti-discrimination law** contained within the Equality Act 2010. This means staff must act to prevent discrimination, harassment and victimisation within the school. This applies to all schools in England and Wales, and most schools in Scotland.
- Your child's school has duty to ensure the safety of your child and where there is reasonable cause to suspect that any child, including yours, is suffering or likely to suffer significant harm the school must act to prevent this.
- Your child's school has a responsibility to identify concerns early and provide help for children, to prevent concerns from escalating.
- They have the responsibility to take appropriate action to promote the welfare of a child in need of additional support, even if they are not suffering harm or are at immediate risk and also working alongside social services, the police, health services and other services to ensure the safeguarding and promotion of child welfare.
- Your child's school should have a designated safeguarding officer and child protection policy.
- The Department for Education (DfE) has produced guidance for all schools including Academies which outlines their duties towards preventing and tackling bullying in schools.

² Section 89, Education and Inspections Act 2006

³ Section 47 (1)(b), Children Act 1989

Academies

- All Academies are required to publish a written complaints procedure, which is available to parents on request.
- **The Independent School Standards Regulations 2010** state that the proprietor of an Academy is required to ensure that an effective anti-bullying strategy is drawn up and implemented.
- Please note that to obtain your child's educational records from an Academy you will need to request the disclosure of their records under the section 7 of the Data Protection Act 1998. Once you have made the request, the records must be made available to you within 40 days.

Free Schools

- All Free Schools are required to publish a written complaints procedure, which is available to parents on request.
- Please note that to obtain your child's educational records from a Free School you will need to request the disclosure of their records under the section 7 of the Data Protection Act 1998. Once you have made the request, the records must be made available to you within 40 days.
- **The Independent School Standards Regulations 2010** state that the proprietor of a Free School is required to ensure that an effective anti-bullying strategy is drawn up and implemented.

Independent Schools

- All Independent Schools are required to publish a written complaints procedure, which is available to parents on request.
- **The Independent School Standards Regulations 2010** state that the proprietor of an Independent School is required to ensure that an effective anti-bullying strategy is drawn up and implemented.
- Please note that to obtain your child's educational records from an Independent School you will need to request the disclosure of their records under the section 7 of the Data Protection Act 1998. Once you have made the request, the records must be made available to you within 40 days.

SCHOOLS' RESPONSIBILITIES

Your child's school is required by law to determine measures to encourage and promote good behaviour and prevent all forms of bullying.

I am worried that my child is vulnerable to bullying

It is natural to worry about your child and bullying but you have a key role in supporting your child as they face challenges through childhood and adolescence. If you are worried that your child might be vulnerable to bullying it is important that you maintain an open and trusting relationship in which your child feels confident to share concerns with you. Make sure you listen to them at all times and agree the action you will take. Often children are terrified that parents will act without their permission and make the situation worse.

Depending on your child's age and development you may want to alert school staff to your concerns. Ask them to keep a discrete eye on your child and their interactions with others.

Don't panic or become over protective – your child must be allowed to experience life and form new relationships – safe in the knowledge that you are always there for them. It also helps to encourage your child to develop friendships outside school and to take part in activities that build confidence and resilience (e.g. Brownies, Scouts and Guides, drama and dance, martial arts, team sports, local youth groups). It is also important to encourage your child not to spend all their time on social networks and to have a healthy attitude to relationships online. This includes discussing issues of friendship and trust online – and the sharing of personal information.

I think my child is being bullied

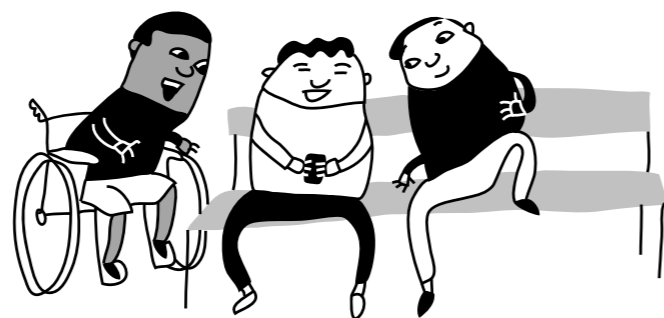
Talk to your child, explain to them what bullying is and what it makes people feel like.

Ask your child if anything like this is happening to them and what it makes them feel like.

If your child discloses that they are being bullied speak calmly and reassuringly to them and discuss what steps should be taken going forward.

Ask your child what they have already tried to do to stop it.

Bear in mind many children do not tell their parents because they are frightened that they will approach the school about the matter, make a fuss and make things worse, so it is a good idea to ask your child what they think could be done to stop the bullying.



FAMILY LIVES

If you have ongoing concerns you can contact Family Lives via their website at familylives.org.uk



What action can your child take?

Even if your child does not disclose to you they are being bullied it is a good idea to talk to them about the action they can take against bullying. This is because they may be too frightened to tell you right now and/or they may come across bullying in the future.

There are a **number of options** to talk through with your child. Talk to them about the pros and cons of each option and let them decide for themselves what they want to do. Your child is the one who will put most of these options into place so encourage them, give them the tools, discuss the strategies with them, and practice each.

- Walk away from the situation, avoid / stay clear of the child(ren) doing it. Make friends with children who are not bullying others. What are the pros and cons of this? Will this even be possible?
- Firmly ask them to stop (for example: "I don't like that name, it makes me upset – please don't do it again.")
- Write a note asking them to stop. The note will say pretty much what they would have said verbally: What, when, where, how they felt and what they want to happen now.
- Ask a witness/friend to ask them to stop.
- Tell a peer mentor or older student if this is an option in the school.
- Report the bullying to a teacher or tutor (some schools may have made confidential provision for reporting bullying such as 'bully boxes' or online reporting tools).
- Make a formal written complaint to the Headteacher.

There are some **additional steps** your child can take if they are experiencing cyberbullying:

- Keep evidence of the bullying by saving content.
- Block abusive users.
- Regularly change your password and never share your password with others.
- Follow the procedures for reporting abusive content on social networks.
- In cases of threats of violence or sexualised content contact the police.

Remind your child that if they are **scared for their safety** they should **remove** themselves from the situation as soon as possible and **tell an adult** that they trust. No child should face bullying, and if they are harmed, or at risk of harm this is a matter for children's services and/or the police.



What should I do if my child is being bullied?

Step 1

- **See notes on previous pages, revisit, and if necessary put into practice.**
- Keep talking to your child, reassuring them that they have done the right thing in telling you about the bullying.
- Keep making notes of what your child says, particularly names, dates, what happened and where it happened.
- If your child has obvious physical injuries such as a cut, bruises, a prick/stab wound made by a compass point, 'Chinese' burn marks, cigarette burn take them to the GP so that there is a record of the injuries or take photos that are dated. If your child's injuries are serious, you should also report it to the police.
- If your child is displaying signs of mental distress, for example suffering from panic attacks, depression, self harm, uncontrolled crying, fear or anxiety and you feel this might be directly related to behaviour or treatment they are receiving at school, you should take them to the GP, telling them how the bullying is affecting your child and, if necessary, ask the GP for a sick note which will give your child authorised absence from school for a period of time.

Step 2

- Tell the class teacher what has been happening and what your child has tried to do to stop it.
- Tell the teacher what your child has told you about the bullying. This may be the first time they become aware of the problem, so be realistic about what you want them to do. The teacher should look into the allegations and take reasonable steps to stop the bullying and protect your child. Ask the teacher for a reasonable timeframe for action to take place.
- Ask for a copy of the school's Anti-Bullying Policy or Behavioural Policy, and ask for clarity on how the school handles bullying incidents.
- Make notes of what you do, the date, to whom you speak and what they say and do

Please note that you may need to put this in writing to class teacher.

2

Step 3

- If you are not satisfied with the class teacher's response, you should make an appointment to speak to the Headteacher or in some cases the member of the school Senior Management Team ("SMT"), such as the Head of Year, responsible for behaviour or for safeguarding. You may want to send a letter telling the Headteacher what the issues are.
- You should also ask for a copy of the school's Complaints Policy (all schools must have one).
- You should ensure that you take a copy of the school's Anti-Bullying Policy or Behaviour Policy with you. You can then refer to the Policy if you feel that the school is not following it.
- If you have not already done so, take your child to the GP and inform them how the bullying is affecting your child so that it can be documented and, if you think it would benefit your child, ask the GP for a sick note which give authorised absence from school for a period of time.

Please note that you may need to put your requests/complaints in writing to the Headteacher.

3

Example of letter to headteacher or member of SMT:

Headteacher/ Member of SMT

School Name
Address line one
Address line two
Town
Postcode

Date

Dear [name of Headteacher/ Member of SMT],

RE: [child's name and date of birth]

My child, A, has been bullied over a period of ... weeks/months by X, Y and Z. The incidents complained of are as follows:

- [List the bullying incidents, including dates, times and locations]

I have spoken to A's class teacher on numerous occasions (listed below) and I am not satisfied with the way in which the matters have been dealt.

- [List the occasions on which the class teacher was spoken to]
- [Details of any medical problems associated with the bullying – both physical and mental – should also be included]

I should like you to undertake a full and thorough investigation of these bullying incidents. Please let me know what action you will be taking, both in relation to the bullying which has occurred and to ensure that my child is not bullied in the future.

Yours sincerely,

Your Signature

[Your name]

Step 4

- If the Headteacher fails to address the bullying problems, you need to make a formal written complaint to the school's Governing Body.
- You should draft your complaint in the way prescribed in the school's Complaints Policy.
- You should at this time also request a copy of your child's educational records. These should detail any action the school has taken and any contact you or someone else has made with the school in relation to the bullying.
- If your child has Special Educational Needs or has developed mental health problems because of the bullying, and you are eligible for Legal Aid, it would at this juncture be prudent to contact the Civil Legal Advice Helpline. Details about this service and eligibility can be found at www.gov.uk/civil-legal-advice

What you should expect from the Governing Body

- The response you get from the Governors will vary from school to school, as each school has the power to set its own complaints procedure. There are however some common factors:
- the Complaints Policy should contain time limits for the Governors to respond to your complaint (usually between seven and twenty-one days).
 - a sub-committee of between three to five Governors will often be appointed to consider your complaint and determine what action should be taken.
 - you may be invited to attend and present evidence to the sub-committee. Usually you are allowed to take a friend or representative along with you to the meeting. Red Balloon is able to offer assistance to you at this stage or direct you to alternative organisations that may be able to assist you.
 - the Headteacher, or another teacher with responsibility for investigating evidence, may be invited to report on the matter. If this happens you may be given the opportunity to question or cross-examine the Headteacher (and vice versa).

Step 5

If you are not happy with the response you receive from the Governing Body you can then make a complaint to:

- the local authority, if the school is a maintained school; or
- the Academy Trust or Education Funding Agency and the Secretary of State, if the school is an Academy;
- the Education Funding Agency or the Department of Education, if the school is a Free School;
- alternatively you could visit Ofsted's Parent View which can be found at parentview.ofsted.gov.uk where you can tell Ofsted what you think about your child's school. This information is used by Ofsted when making decision about which schools to inspect and, when.

For more information about making a complaint, visit:

Education Funding Agency
www.gov.uk/government/organisations/education-funding-agency/about/complaints-procedure

or write to:

Secretary of State c/o the Department for Education
Complaints
Ministerial and Public
Communications Division,
Department for Education,
Piccadilly Gate, Store Street
Manchester, M1 2WD



Example of a formal letter of complaint:

Governing Body

School Name
Address line one
Address line two
Town
Postcode

Date

Dear Sir/Madam,

RE: [child's name and date of birth]

I wish to make a formal complaint.
My child, A, has been bullied over a period of ... weeks/months by X, Y and Z.
The incidents complained of are as follows:

- [List the bullying incidents, including dates, times and locations]

I have spoken to A's class teacher and the Headteacher on numerous occasions.
These are listed below:

- [List the occasions on which the class teacher and the Headteacher were spoken to]
- [Details of any medical problems associated with the bullying – both physical and mental – should also be included]

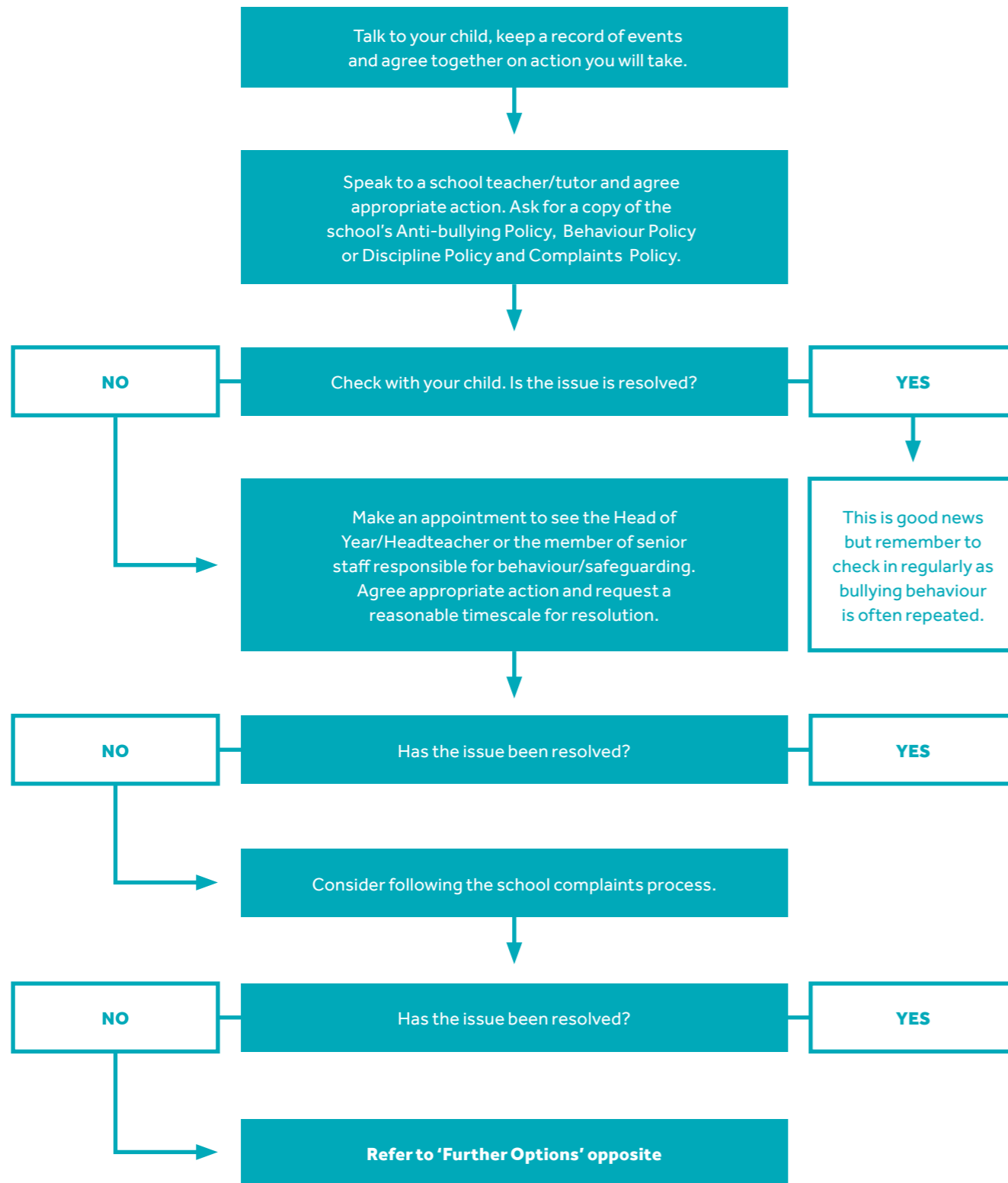
I should like a full and thorough investigation of these bullying incidents. Please let me know what action you will be taking, both in relation to the bullying which has occurred and to ensure that my child is not bullied in the future.

Yours faithfully,

Your Signature

[Your name]

If your child is being bullied



Further options

Remember!

Bullying is a child protection issue, so can be reported to the local authority children's services team and to the police.

State schools (Maintained and Academy)

Report your concerns to Ofsted if they relate to whole school practice and poor management.

Maintained schools (State schools that are not Academies or Free Schools)

Report your concerns to the Department for Education

Academies and Free Schools

Report your concerns to the Education Funding Agency (EFA) if they are not following their funding agreement or complaints process

Independent Schools

If your child's school is not meeting standards relating to welfare then report your concerns to the Department for Education

For further details including relevant complaint forms visit www.gov.uk/complain-about-school



Withdrawing your child from school

Withdrawing your child from school can often be problematic and may isolate your child even further from their peer group. If your child stops attending school, the school will treat their absence as unauthorised (unless your GP has issued your child a valid sick note), which could result in you being prosecuted for their non-attendance and result in a fine or imprisonment.

If your child is 'self-excluding' or has a real risk of being injured if they attend school you should seek a medical certificate from your GP to authorise your child's absence. You should also consider contacting social services, your education welfare officer (if you have one) and the school to inform them of the situation.

Do not take your child off the school roll, even if they are no longer attending, as this could result in a situation where you are responsible for providing your child's education. It will not help the situation in any way and may make things harder to deal with.

If your child will not attend school and the local authority is trying to make you, or persuade you to home educate remember that as long as your child is on a school roll it is that **school's duty** to provide them with a suitable education. If the school is failing to do so, then it is the **local authority's duty** to ensure that your child is provided with suitable education. This **does not** mean forcing you to elect to home educate.

Bullying and the police

Bullying in itself is not a specific criminal offence in the United Kingdom. Some incidents of bullying are not actually crimes and, therefore might not be a matter for the police.

However, other types of bullying are illegal and **can be** reported to the police. These include bullying that involves the following (whether face to face or online):

- violence or threats of violence;
- assault (including sexual assault);
- malicious communication;
- harassment e.g. name calling, threatening behaviour, abusive phone calls, text messages, e-mails and Facebook messages;
- theft;
- intimidation;
- any of the above that are committed because of the victim's disability, gender-identity, race, religion, belief or sexual orientation.

Information and support for children and young people

Anti-Bullying Alliance

A coalition of organisations and individuals committed to stopping all forms of bullying between children and young people. Website contains information and advice relating to all forms of bullying.

www.anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk
[@ABAonline](https://twitter.com/ABAonline)

Childline

- 24 hour helpline for children and young people with concerns about bullying 0800 11 11
- Online support for children and young people with concerns about bullying
- Website with information about bullying including a new short video to build the confidence of children that have been bullied

0800 1111
www.childline.org.uk
[@childline](https://twitter.com/childline)

Get Connected

Helpline for children and young people under 25 - 0808 808 4994. Also a text, email and webchat facility.

0808 808 4994
www.getconnected.org.uk
[@getconnecteduk](https://twitter.com/getconnecteduk)

The Diana Award (Anti-Bullying Programme)

- Website available to all with information, advice and good practice for young people, professionals and parents.
- Training across UK and Ireland: Training targeting victims, perpetrators and bystanders. Young people can be trained to recognise bullying behaviour and its root causes as well to help their peers tackle bullying online and offline. Professionals can be trained to lead on anti-bullying work and support a peer led programme/student team.

www.diana-award.org.uk
[@DianaAward](https://twitter.com/DianaAward)

EACH (Education Action Challenging Homophobia)

Action line for children and young people with concerns about homophobic bullying.

0808 1000 143
www.each.education

Stonewall

Website with information and advice tailored to under 21s who have concerns about homophobic bullying.

08000 502020
www.stonewall.org.uk
[@stonewalluk](https://twitter.com/stonewalluk)

The Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP)

Website with information and resources for children and young people about staying safe online.

www.thinkuknow.org.uk
[@ThinkuknowUK](https://twitter.com/ThinkuknowUK)

Ditch the Label

Ditch the Label provides informative advice, research and engaging content tailored to young people aged 13-25 aimed to reduce the prominence and harmful effect of bullying. Ditch the Label also offer email support as well as drop-in chat sessions via the social networking platform Habbo Hotel.

www.ditchthelabel.org
[@ditchthelabel](https://twitter.com/ditchthelabel)



Information and support for parents and carers

Anti-Bullying Alliance

A coalition of organisations and individuals committed to stopping all forms of bullying between children and young people. Website with information and advice relating to all forms of bullying.

www.anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk
[@ABAonline](#)

Family Lives

24 hour helpline for parents and carers who have concerns about bullying. They also have an email facility.

0808 800 2222
www.familylives.org.uk
[@familylives](#)

Contact a Family

- Free helpline for parents and carers of disabled children who have concerns about bullying. Free advice guides and training for parents and carers relating to bullying.
- Network of parent support groups.

0808 808 3555
www.cafamily.org.uk
[@contactafamily](#)

The Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP)

Website with information and resources for children and young people about staying safe online.

www.thinkuknow.org.uk
[@ThinkuknowUK](#)

Childnet

Website with information and advice for parents and carers on how to keep your child safe online including how to make a report online.

www.childnet.com
[@childnet](#)

Ditch the Label

Ditch the Label provides research relating to all forms of bullying, designed to give insightful perspectives as well educate audiences of the causes, effects and prevention methods. Ditch the Label also provides email support to parents and carers.

www.ditchthelabel.org
[@ditchthelabel](#)

Red Balloon Learner Centres

Red Balloon provides educational and therapeutic 'intensive care' for children and young people who have self-excluded from mainstream school because of severe bullying or trauma. The Learner Centres offer an individualised academic, personal and social programme with the aim of raising the students' self-esteem, getting them back on an academic track, and supporting their return to mainstream education.

01223 366052
www.redballoonlearner.org
[@RedBalloonLCG](#)



ANTI-BULLYING ALLIANCE

25%
of children worry
about bullying.
That's over 2 million.

Contact us

Anti-Bullying Alliance

Anti-Bullying Alliance is a partnership body based at National Children's Bureau. Registered Charity No 258825.

www.anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk

[@ABAonline](#)

+44(0)20 7843 6000

8 Wakley Street London EC1V 7QE

Red Balloon Learner Centres

The aim of Red Balloon Learner Centres is the recovery of bullied children not accessing full time education. Registered Charity No 1109606.

www.redballoonlearner.org

[@RedBalloonLCG](#)

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Red Balloon
LEARNER CENTRES
For the recovery of bullied children

