Anti-Bullying Week 2011

14–18 November 2011

Stop and think – words can hurt

Advice for parents and carers

The Anti-Bullying Alliance (ABA) is committed to stopping bullying in all its forms. Since it was launched in 2005, Anti-Bullying Week has gone from strength to strength thanks to the enthusiasm of schools, children and young people and their parents and carers.

What is bullying

ABA defines bullying as the **repetitive, intentional hurting of one person by another, where the relationship involves an imbalance of power.** Bullying can be physical, verbal or psychological. It includes behaviour such as:

- name-calling
- spreading hurtful stories
- excluding someone from groups and breaking up friendships
- making demeaning comments about gender, culture, religion or sexuality
- making demeaning comments about a disability or illness
- taking possessions or money
- hitting, pushing or kicking.

Cyberbullying has the same effect as face-to-face verbal or psychological bullying but it takes place via mobile phones, emails or texting. The behaviour can be carried out by an individual or a group and could include for example sending hurtful texts, spreading rumours through social networking sites, uploading private or distorted images or film, sending abusive comments through gaming sites, or assuming a false identity to cause harm or mischief.

Verbal bullying

Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me.

We have all heard someone say this at one time or other – we may have said it ourselves – but how true is it? Anti-Bullying Week this year focuses on verbal bullying - using words to deliberately cause someone hurt and distress.

Verbal bullying could include name-calling, threats, manipulation, mockery, slander, spreading lies and gossip. It is usually carried out face-to-face but would also include malicious phone calls. Verbal bullying is often prejudice related – such as the use of homophobic insults, sexist words, and racist or disbalist insults. Verbal bullying can also be targeted at someone's physical appearance, such as their weight, their skin, or their clothes. Verbal bullying is commonplace amongst young people – even if in some instances younger children use these words without understanding their meaning.

Young people at the ABA Youth Summit 2010 told us that name-calling and offensive language is a serious issue for them in their schools, communities and in cyberspace. In their experience, when derogatory or offensive language remains unchallenged, it can lead to a climate where bullying behaviour is seen as normal or acceptable.

What signs should parents and carers look out for?

It is important that parents and carers recognise the signs that may tell them if a child or a young person is either being bullied or bullying – what might they be doing, saying or feeling. If you suspect that this may be happening, look out for the following signs. You may see one or more signs, for example your child could:

- show signs of stress – being moody, silent or crying, or bullying a younger sibling or friend
- make excuses to miss school, such as stomach complaints or headaches (or your child may be skipping school altogether)
- seem upset after using the internet or mobile, or change their behaviour – for example, no longer wanting to look at new text messages immediately and be secretive and unwilling to talk about their online activities and phone use
- be withdrawn in their behaviour
- have more bruises or scrapes than usual
- change their eating habits
- have torn clothes, school things that are broken or missing, or have 'lost' money
- sleep badly
- wet the bed.

There could be other reasons for these signs so you need to ask yourself the following questions.

- Could there be anything else bothering your child?
- Could there be changes in your family life like a new baby, or divorce or separation that may be affecting your child's behaviour?

How can parents and carers help?

There is no easy answer when it comes to bullying behaviour – every situation is different and requires a different approach.

- **If you think your child is being bullied, don't panic – try to keep an open mind.** Your key role is listening, calming and providing reassurance that

the situation can get better when action is taken. Provide a quiet, calm place where they can talk about what is happening.

- **Listen and reassure them that coming to you was the right thing to do.** It may not be easy for a child to talk about being bullied so it is important to try to find out how they are feeling, what has happened, when and where. Though at this stage it is not so much about establishing a set of facts as encouraging, talking and listening.
- **Assure them that the bullying is not their fault and that you are there to support them.** Remind them that they can also have the support of family and friends.
- **Find out what the child or young person wants to happen.** Help them to identify the choices available to them, the potential next steps to take and the skills they may have to help solve the problems.
- **Discuss the situation with your child's school.** The law requires all schools to have a behaviour policy which sets out the measures that will be taken to encourage good behavior and respect for others and to prevent all forms of bullying among pupils. Parents can get advice and support from the Parentline helpline on 0808 800 2222 or visit www.familylives.org.uk

A child or a young person needs the support of those adults closest to them and that of other adults who have a relationship of trust or authority with them. They may also find it helpful to talk to another young person they trust.

What not to do

Young people have asked us to make sure parents and carers are made aware of the things that *won't* help.

- Don't let your anger or fear get in the way of an open discussion.
- Don't disbelieve or mistrust what you are hearing.
- Don't make the young person think it is their fault.
- Don't say that bullying has to be lived through as it is 'part of growing up' and they just have to put up with it.
- Don't give a sense that nothing can be done to make things improve.
- Don't take action before you really know what is going on.
- Don't pressurise or threaten anyone.

Where can a young person get more information and help?

ChildLine

ChildLine is the UK's free, confidential helpline for children and young people. Trained volunteers are on hand to provide advice and support, by phone and online, 24 hours a day. Call Childline on 0800 1111 or visit www.childline.org.uk

CyberMentors

CyberMentors is a safe social networking site providing information and support for young people affected by bullying. Young people aged 11 to 25 are trained as CyberMentors in schools and online, so that they can offer support and advice to other young people. CyberMentors are also supported by trained counsellors, who are available online if needed. For more information and free CyberMentors resources visit www.cybermentors.org.uk

Where can adults get help to support a young person?

Family Lives

Family Lives is a national charity that works for and with, parents. You can get support and advice from the Parentline helpline on 0808 800 2222 or visit www.familylives.org.uk

Kidscape

Kidscape works UK-wide to provide individuals and organisations with the practical skills and resources necessary to keep children safe from harm. It runs assertiveness training courses for children and young people under the age of 16, their parents or carers, and those who work with them. Kidscape operates a telephone helpline for the parents and carers of bullied children. Call 08451 205204 or visit www.kidscape.org.uk

Advisory Centre for Education

Offers advice for parents and children on all school matters.

Call 0808 800 5793 or visit www.ace-ed.org.uk

Children's Legal Centre

The Child Law Advice Line provides free legal advice and information covering all aspects of English law and policy affecting children.

Call 08088 020 008 or visit www.childrenslegalcentre.com

Acknowlegement

In the preparation of this briefing ABA has drawn on materials produced by Young ABA *(Keep an Eye on it)* and respectme *(Bullying ….You can make a difference: A practical guide for parents and carers)*.

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