BULLYING: WHAT TO DO IF YOUR CHILD IS BEING BULLIED OR IS BULLYING OTHERS

Facilitator’s NOTES

You will need: flipchart or whiteboard, markers, parent handouts for end of session

Use this resource to structure your session, but feel free to allow time for discussion on any point that the group wishes to explore in more detail.

What is Bullying?

Bullying is hurtful behaviour, often repeated over a period of time. It can happen in and out of schools, as well as within families and other social groups. It can also take place online, through social media or on mobile phones (cyberbullying). Because bullying can occur at any time and in a variety of ways, a child may feel that there is no escape from it, even in the safety of their own home.

Facilitator: use a flipchart/whiteboard to get parents/carers to suggest different types of bullying. If necessary use the following list as prompts:

Types of bullying include:

- Exclusion – by ignoring or isolating a young person
- Verbal – name calling, spreading gossip, making unpleasant comments
- Non-verbal – gestures, staring
- Physical – hitting, pushing, hair pulling
- Emotional – intimidating, frightening or threatening someone
- Undermining – criticising, spreading rumours, belittling
- Racist, sexist or homophobic comments or behaviour
- Cyberbullying – online through social networks or mobile phones

What should I look out for?

A child or young person may be too frightened to tell anyone, in case the bullying gets worse, or if they believe that they somehow deserve the bullying they are experiencing. Bullying can affect a child’s health, although the effects may not be visible. There are several warning signs to look out for, although none of this indicates for certain that your child is being bullied.
Facilitator: get parents/carers to identify warning signs. If necessary use the following list as prompts:

You may notice that your child:

- Has had their belongings taken or damaged
- Is reluctant or afraid to go to school, when they have previously been happy to do so
- Claims to be ‘ill’ regularly on school mornings
- Comes home hungry from not eating lunch (if their dinner money has been taken)
- Has an unexplained drop in performance at school
- Is reluctant or afraid to travel alone to school
- Starts asking for, or stealing, money from you (if they need it to pay bullies)
- Loses confidence, seems anxious, nervous or withdrawn
- Stops eating or sleeping properly
- Starts to bully younger siblings
- Comes home with unexplained physical injuries

The effects of bullying can be devastating and sometimes long-lasting. Bullying may drive children to self-harm or even suicide.

**Why do people bully?**

Bullying can be perpetrated by adults as well as by children and young people, however the root causes are often the same. Children tend to bully others who are smaller and younger than them, as this advantage gives them a sense of power. Alternatively, they may feel powerless themselves and bully others in order to gain a sense of power.

Children may have learned aggressive behaviours from adults around them. They may also be used to getting their own way, maybe by having tantrums, or they may have learned aggressive behaviour through having been bullied themselves.

Some bullies may not be conscious of their motives and may not realise how badly their behaviour is affecting the victim. The victim may be someone who they have seen being bullied by others, which may make them feel justified in joining in with the bullying.

**What should I do if my child is being bullied?**

It is upsetting for parents to know that their child is being bullied. However, it is important that you stay calm and do not add to the child’s distress by becoming angry or overly upset yourself. Your first response should be to sit down with the child and ask them if they are being bullied. You may need to explain what bullying is to a younger child. It can be hard for a child to confide in you about bullying because they may fear what will happen if they tell. They may worry about you going to the school and making a scene. Or they may feel ashamed, or worry about upsetting you.
Do not jump to conclusions or assume that your child’s version of events is the only one. You must gather as much information as possible before taking any action.

If the bullying seems mild, the best response may be for you to help your child learn strategies for dealing with it. If the bullying seems moderate or severe, you should consider whether to contact the school or the organisers of the setting where it is occurring (e.g. Scouts’ group, sports club, church group or madrassah).

Facilitator: ask if any parents/carers have successfully used strategies for dealing with bullies. Some may wish to give anecdotal examples, so reiterate that names of others should not be mentioned. This can lead on to discussing the following strategies:

**Strategies for dealing with bullying**

- Encourage the child to walk away from the bully when he/she starts being unkind
- Encourage the child to stay in a group when possible, as they are less likely to be bullied when with others
- Help your child make new friends
- Suggest your child tells someone they can trust like a teacher or another grown-up they know
- Teach your child assertiveness skills, like learning to shout ‘No!’, and to develop more confident body language
- Act out some simple role plays, so your child can practise what to do when confronted by the bully
- Encourage your child to look calm, disinterested or neutral when approached by the bully
- Enhance your child’s self-esteem by doing things with them to build their self-confidence (e.g. learning a new skill like swimming), and make them feel good about themselves

Remember that these strategies may be very difficult for a child who is upset or frightened by bullying. If your child is unwilling to talk to you, encourage them to contact Childline (0800 1111).

**Talking to the school**

If your child is being bullied at school, and you have discussed this with your child, you may decide to talk to the school in an attempt to have it stopped. All schools have a responsibility to protect pupils from bullying, and should have an anti-bullying policy. If you decide to approach the school, you should ask to speak to the classroom teacher (primary school), or the form tutor or Head of Year (secondary school).

**Other sources of help**

If a child is being bullied somewhere other than at school, there are other places you can seek help, depending on the circumstances. These may include:

- The group leader if the bullying is taking place within an organised sports, faith or community setting
- Local Safer Neighbourhoods Police
- Your GP, who may be able to arrange professional counselling
- NSPCC

**Preventing my child from becoming a bully**

*Facilitator: you may wish to use this section in a separate session or even with one or two parents who have disclosed that their child is involved in bullying. It is important to manage the group effectively here as parents may feel vulnerable or worried about discussing their child’s bullying behaviour in front of others.*

Effective parenting is the key to ensuring your child respects others and treats them appropriately. This starts at home and from a very young age, and it is essential that parents model the behaviours they want their children to display. You can help your child by:

- Teaching self-control
- Not tolerating mistreatment of others
- Being consistent in rewarding good behaviour and applying negative consequences for poor behaviour
- Teaching your child to treat others the way they would like to be treated
- Teaching your child to control his/her anger
- Discussing news stories/TV storylines etc. which portray themes of bullying or unkindness
- Teaching your child the importance of saying “I’m sorry” when they have misbehaved or upset someone, and then being kind to that person, especially a younger sibling.

**What if my child is already bullying?**

It can be very difficult for parents to accept that their child is the one who is bullying others. However, it is important that you address this behaviour as soon as possible to prevent it developing any further. You should:

- Stay calm.
- Calmly discuss the bullying incident with your child and write down the details (who, what, where, etc)
- Discuss with your child’s school and offer to work with them to change your child’s behaviour
- Apply fair, clear and significant negative consequences (eg. grounding, making child repay stolen money or replace stolen/damaged item)
- Require your child to apologise to the victim (verbally or in writing, as appropriate)
- Help your child to find a positive area of interest or hobby, preferably one that involves co-operation or helping others
- Reinforce/reward positive and kind behaviour
- If necessary, seek professional counselling for your child
- Explore reasons why your child is bullying others – examine your own behaviour and think about what may be going on at home that may be having an impact.