



A Parents' Guide to Understanding the Issues Surrounding Bullying



What is bullying?

Bullying is not always easy to define. However, many definitions include the following;

- Deliberate hostility and aggression towards the victim
- Persistent attack
- A victim who is weaker and less powerful than the bully or bullies
- An outcome which is always painful and distressing for the victim

Bullying can be:

Physical – pushing, hitting, kicking, pinching and many other forms of violence, threats

Verbal – Name-calling, sarcasm, spreading rumours, persistent teasing

Racist – racial taunts, graffiti, gesture

Sexual – unwanted physical contact, abusive comments, homophobic abuse

Emotional bullying such as ridicule and refusing to speak to or include someone seem to be more common than physical violence and judging from what young people state it can also be the most difficult to prove and to tackle.

Persistent bullying can result in

- Depression
- Low self-esteem
- Shyness
- Poor academic achievement
- Isolation
- Threatened or attempted suicide

Something that is not often considered by many is that unchecked bullying also damages the bully who learns that he or she can get away with violence, aggression and threats and that this sort of behaviour gets them what they want.

Myths about bullying

“I was bullied at school and it didn’t do me any harm”. This is often said aggressively as if the person is still ashamed. They may have forgotten the pain they suffered.

“He’ll just have to learn to stand up for himself”. Children who tell about bullying have usually reached the end of their tether. If they could have dealt with the bullying they would have. Asking for support is not a weakness but a recognition that they cannot cope with the situation on their own.

“Tell him to hit back harder”. The victim could be hurt physically and hitting back also reinforces the idea that violence and aggression are acceptable forms of behaviour both in our school and in the wider society.

“It’s character building”. The sort of character it builds is not the sort of character most parents want for their children. Bullying can damage victims’ self esteem and can make them reserved and distrustful.

“Sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me”. Bruises left by blows fade and heal but the scars left by verbal abuse can last a lifetime.

“That’s not bullying! It’s just kids teasing”. Teasing can get out of hand and can turn into vicious taunting. What some children describe as ‘banter,’ can make people feel incredibly uncomfortable. Once the victim feels any sort of hurt from this then it has turned into bullying.

Why do some children bully others?

There are many reasons why a child may become a bully. Some people turn to bullying as a way of coping with a difficult situation; the death of a relative, their parents’ divorce, some are even victims of abuse elsewhere in their life and take out their humiliation and anger on others. Some want to be seen as ‘alpha one’ or ‘top dog’ and are prepared to use aggression to command obedience and loyalty.

Bullies have to learn that bullying is unacceptable and that, if they continue to behave unacceptably, then there are consequences, both at home and in school. Bullies should be given plenty of encouragement and help to change, as well as ensuring that they clearly understand that they cannot get away with tormenting others.

What to do if your child is the bully?

If you learn from them or from information provided by an outside agency or the school there are a number of things you can do:

- Try and stay calm
- Try not to become angry and defensive
- Ask exactly what your child has been doing
- Ask if they have behaved like this before
- Talk to your child’s teachers at school – this could be their subject teacher, learning family mentor or their head of house. Gather as much unbiased information as possible. What your child tells you may not always be the whole truth.
- See if he or she has any ideas about why they bully and what they think might help them stop.
- Reassure your child that you still love them – it’s their behaviour that you don’t like.
- Find out if there is anything in particular that is troubling your child
- Work out a way for them to make amends for the bullying
- Set up some sort of reward for good behaviour – often verbal praise for something they are proud of will do the trick! Create opportunities for them to shine
- Set clear limits and boundaries. Stop any show of aggression immediately and help the child find other non-aggressive ways of reacting.
- Explain that getting away from a situation where they can feel themselves losing their temper, or things getting out of hand, is not a weakness. The school can work with you and your child on this,

perhaps ensuring there is a clear 'time-out' system for them to use which everyone involved is clear about.

- Teach your child the difference between assertive behaviour and aggressive behaviour.
- Other children may deliberately provoke a bully. Explain to your child that they may be taunted and provoked but that they should try and not respond aggressively. They should walk away quickly and speak to a member of staff that they trust. Agree these steps with key members of staff at the school who know about the situation.
- Communication with the school is vital. Stay in contact and share your concerns. We will do everything we can to help.

Who are the victims?

Children and young people who bully, pick on people because they need a victim, often as an outlet for their own issues and anger. They will pick on people for a variety of different reasons; height, weight, hair colour and clothing are all popular reasons. This so called 'difference' is just an excuse which the bully needs to 'justify' their own behaviour. Nobody should suffer bullying because of these or any other reasons. Our school aims to provide an environment in which differences are appreciated and everyone feels valued. We take bullying very seriously and respond to every issue that is raised with us as a school. However, this may not always take the form of a simple punishment. Although this might make us feel as if 'justice has been done' it is not a long-term solution and is simply 'applying a sticking plaster' to an open wound. At Chantry we aim to work with the bullies and the victims to help them understand their behaviour and change it. This could be using our skilled mediators which are a team of both staff and students who are trained to deal with serious issues such as bullying.

Cyber –Bullying

Cyber- bullying has become far more prevalent in the last few years due to the increase in the use of social networking sites and mobile technology. The main thing to consider for victims of this kind of bullying is that what was once was a safe-haven from bullying; the home; has now become a place that can also be accessed. However, often in cyber issues there are times when the 'victim' needs to be aware of how to keep themselves safe and can do things to avoid the issue spiralling out of control. For parents it is important that you know how and when your child accesses the internet and uses social networking sites. A Facebook status update for example can often 'invite' comments which can get out of hand. There is no limit to how many times people can comment on a status and this can be how nasty conversation and insults are traded. Get your child to think before they post anything on websites such as this. The same can also be said for any young person commenting on someone else's status or wall. This kind of comment can mean that your child can become involved in a serious bullying issue without actually realising or intending the impact it is having on the victim. It is important to stress to young people that a cyber friend may not actually be a friend. Be careful who you accept as such.... they will have access to anything you write or any photographs you may post. If you are not careful social networking sites can become an arena for public humiliation and embarrassment and they need to be treated with caution. Explain to your child how to use these facilities safely.

Girls' friendships, fights and feuds

This is an area which takes up a huge amount of time and resources within school. Girl's friendships can often have incredibly complex undertones in the struggle to be accepted and not be 'left out'. Following research and observation in many schools, it is well known that girls' friendships appear to be more fractious and disputatious than those of boys. Those in frequent contact with teenage girls are aware of the fractious nature of their friendships and the process where friends become enemies at the drop of a hat. One minute, two girls are best friends; the next they have quarrelled and are at daggers drawn. Each girl within a girl friendship group appears to come under fire in turns as though on a carousel. In fact, the insult gossip and rumour that appears to come with these groups can be incredibly hurtful and damaging and as a school and as a parent we should not underestimate the power that this can have. It is essential that we discuss the details of these fallouts, however often these occur, as it can help the group take control of their own friendships. By ignoring these fallouts and the emotions that go alongside them we are failing to understand the complex mechanisms of how girls distribute power and manipulate each other by changing their friendship allegiances. Mediation and older peer mentoring can work well in these situations by allowing the girls a controlled forum to air any issues that are bubbling under and helping them to find their own solutions to their problems and by modelling what it means to be a good female friend. If you are concerned about your child's friendship then it can be useful to share these concerns with a teacher who comes into contact with them regularly.

Possible signs that a child is being bullied

This list is not exhaustive by any means and communication with your child is the most vital element of the relationship but these may be some clues which help to make the 'bigger picture. Young people may be;

- Frightened of walking to and from school and ask for a lift
- Change their usual route without explanation
- Be unwilling to go to school or be school phobic
- Feel ill in the mornings
- Begin truanting
- Begin doing poorly in the school work. This may be noted by their form tutor or learning family mentor or you will see this is a drop in levels or grades on their report.
- Come home regularly with books or items of clothing damaged or 'lost'
- Become withdrawn and lacking in confidence
- Become distressed and anxious
- Attempt or threaten suicide or self-harm
- Begin to have nightmares or problems sleeping
- Have unexplained scratches or bruises
- Begin to bully other siblings or act aggressively in the home. This can be especially noticeable just after school, early in the morning or on a Sunday evening.

How you can help your child

If you are worried that your child is being bullied, ask him or her directly. Young people who are being bullied are often too frightened of the consequences to tell about what is happening so be prepared for your child to deny at first that there is anything wrong. Encourage your child by saying that you are concerned but that you will not do anything without talking to them first; young people are often scared that parents telling the school will make the situation worse. You may find that your child is a perpetual victim; sometimes known as a provocative victim, and that they are bullied wherever they go. In this case, think about how they react to people. Help them develop social skills. We can also help with this in school with our extensive support programme.

Supporting victims

As well as working alongside the bullies to change their behaviour, it is obviously important that we as a school offer support to the victims throughout the situation. There is also a series of things that you can do at home to support your child:

1. Reassure them that the bullying is not their fault.
2. Explain that reacting to the bullies can often encourage them. If bullies cannot goad a victim into a response then they will often get bored.
3. Practice assertiveness techniques with your child. It is hard for the bully to keep on if the victim doesn't get upset and simply walks away.
4. Try and minimise opportunities for bullying eg. Don't take valuable possessions into school, ensure that you are not walking alone or left in a situation such as a changing room or toilet block alone.
5. Make time to sit down and talk to your child – encourage them to tell you how they feel and discuss these feelings and ideas.
6. Praise is again essential. Making them feel good about themselves and raising self-esteem is a brilliant way of gaining self-confidence

Self – Assertiveness for victims and bullies

The following information could be useful in terms of reading with and discussing with your child.

If you are a victim of bullying or if you bully other people, practising some basic self-assertiveness skills can help you feel better about yourself and your situation. Self-assertiveness training can also teach you different way of responding to difficult or upsetting situations.

There are three response styles;

- Passive
- Aggressive
- Assertive

Passive people behave as if other people's rights matter more than theirs

Aggressive people behave as if their rights matter more than those of others

Assertive people respect themselves and others equally

Making Requests

- Be clear about what you want
- Plan ahead and practice
- Make your request short and precise
- Decide what you want to say and stick to it

Saying NO

- When you say no, say it firmly
- Listen to your body and your feelings
- Try not to get caught up in arguments
- If you don't want to do something, don't give in to pressure
- Don't make excuses
- Offer an alternative

When we say no to someone, we are only refusing the request. We are not rejecting the person.

Dealing with taunts and insults

Fogging is a visualisation technique you can use to try to limit your upset when this happens. When other people make hurtful remarks, don't argue and try not to become upset. Imagine that you are inside a huge, blank, white fog-bank: the insults are swallowed up by the fog long before they reach you. Nothing touches you.

Practice by thinking of the worst things a bully says to you and pretend that you are inside your fog-bank – nothing reaches you.

Dealing with anger

If you lose your temper or become violent and aggressive easily, you need to practice controlling these feelings. It is not necessarily wrong to get angry but it is wrong to take your anger out on others.

- Learn to recognise the signs that you are about to 'explode' – work out what you are going to do next time you feel that you are losing your temper.
- Getting away from the situation or the person that is making you angry – this is not running away. This is the best way of keeping yourself and others from getting hurt either through a physical fight or verbal arguments.
- Take several deep breaths and count to ten
- Exercise helps let off steam
- Practise simple relaxation exercises – anger, stress and anxiety are often related and if you learn to relax, it will be easier to control your temper. Tense every muscle in your body and then slowly relax each individual muscle, starting with your toes.

Working with the school

As a school we have a robust system in place for dealing with bullying of any kind. If you learn that your child is being bullied, the first step is to get in contact with the school and inform of what you suspect or what you know. Without this initial contact, sometimes it can be difficult to know everything that goes on within the school community. You can make contact with any member of staff you feel comfortable talking to such as their learning family mentor, their house manager, head of house, or directly to myself (Ms. Morrow). You can ask to set up a meeting or simply speak on the phone. You may wish to meet with or without your child in attendance. Try and keep a note of what is happening. It's really useful if your child can give names or places where the bullying is occurring. If the bullying is cyber-bullying then any print outs of facebook, bebo or msn contact is really helpful and keeping text messages as evidence can also be of use. We also have a team of trained community support officers and police who work closely with the school and often they can also be of use when dealing with serious incidents or those that are happening outside of school. It is really important when talking to the school that you try not to be aggressive or lose your temper. We do understand how frustrating and upsetting the issue of bullying can be for everyone but working together, rather than against each other is of prime importance and can help achieve a much better resolution for your child.

What we do at Chantry High School

It is important to acknowledge that bullying goes on in every school, as is true with workplaces for adults. Those schools who claim that they do not have a bullying problem are often ignoring what is really going on in terms of relationships within their institution. What is important are the steps we take to deal with it and working together towards a long-term solution rather than a quick fix. Some bullying issues can be incredibly complex and take a long-time to 'unpick'. As a school we are committed to the following;

- Taking the problem seriously
- Investigating any reported incident
- Interviewing the reported 'bully' and 'victim' individually
- Talking to any witnesses or staff who may be involved
- Raising the awareness of bullying in the school community via assemblies, whole school activities and PSHE sessions
- Using restorative work and mediation to acknowledge feelings and to challenge and ultimately change behaviour
- Working closely with the victims and bullies on long term solutions, actions plans and goals.

An Introduction to Mentoring at Chantry High School

At Chantry High School we are committed to our three core aims;

- **Listen More**
- **Achieve More**
- **Look After Each Other More**
- In our focus on looking after each other we have developed our school wide peer mentoring scheme which we call '**Understanding Students**'. The issues we address range from bullying and friendship issues to problems with schoolwork and stress and depression. We currently have over 40 trained '**US**' **mentors** in years 8-11 who work across all year groups to ensure that every student feels that they have access to the support they need.
- The support we offer students comes in a variety of forms. Every learning family in the lower school is supported by an older mentor from year 10 or 11 who help the group once a week and the students are invited to share any problems or issues they have in one to one conversations. We also offer targeted mentoring where students who are struggling with home or school issues are offered to meet with a specific student on a regular basis to talk through their concerns and work out an action plan. This support can be ongoing and we currently have working partnerships that have been set up for over a year.
- Our most innovative introduction in the field of mentoring is our web based and text service. We offer a **dedicated text number** which students can use to book mentoring meetings and access advice from staff. **The 'Understanding Students' website** can be accessed from any computer at home or in school and also now on smart phones. This allows students to anonymously post problems which can be responded to within 24 hours by trained peer mentors. These remain completely confidential between the mentor and student but the content is safely monitored by staff on a daily basis. This is the only scheme of its kind in Suffolk at the moment and we are extremely proud of the service we offer our young people. You can access the website at **www.understandingstudents.com**

For any more information on this service or the anti-bullying strategy within Chantry High School please see Ms. Morrow.

K. Morrow. 2011