preventing bullying!
A Parent’s Guide
Dear Parents,

Thank you for sending for this valuable guide. This is a positive step towards helping your child. I was severely bullied at school in the early seventies. Unfortunately at that time there was no KIDSCAPE to offer my Mother support and advice. She battled in vain to get my school to notice that there was a very real problem. The school was very dismissive and my individual teachers were frightened to speak out. Eventually I had no alternative but to change schools. This was drastic action as my bus journey to the new school was over an hour each way.

I was very happy in my new school as I was able to break the bullying cycle by starting all over again. In many ways this was an easier option than the task that now faces you. I most strongly urge you to be bold and brave in your fight for what you know is right for your child. If your child is a victim, it is not their fault. Something about them may have made them stand out from the crowd but, if you analyse these qualities, you will probably find those are what make your child special and what will probably make them successful in later life. These qualities should be protected - your child should not be forced to change. Many successful people, people in the public eye, people who have pursued their dreams, have succeeded in spite of being bullied at school. They didn't change.

I strongly believe that if I or my parents had given in, and I had become like everyone else, I would not be the person I am today, happy and fulfilled in my chosen career.

With best wishes,

Amanda Ross
KIDSCAPE Trustee

Amanda has had a successful career in broadcasting for the last thirteen years. She has presented a number of TV shows and now runs her own production company which last year made over 45 hours of programmes for BBC1.
WHAT IS BULLYING?

Bullying is not always easy to define. However, Dan Olweus, an expert in the prevention of bullying, says that bullying includes:

- deliberate hostility and aggression towards the victim
- 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, kicking, hitting, pinching, and any other forms of violence, threats (e.g. “If you don’t give me your dinner money, you’ll be sorry.”)

**Verbal:** name-calling, sarcasm, spreading rumours, persistent teasing

**Emotional:** excluding (e.g. sending to Coventry), tormenting (e.g. hiding books, threatening gestures), ridicule, humiliation

**Racist:** racial slurs, graffiti, gestures

**Sexual:** unwanted physical contact, abusive comments, homophobic abuse

Emotional bullying like ridicule and sending to Coventry seems to be more common than physical violence and, judging from what young people tell us at KIDSCHAPSE, it can also be the most difficult type of bullying to cope with or to prove.

Peter, a 9 year old victim of emotional bullying, told us that the only time he was believed by his teacher was when he had bruises on his legs after being kicked by the bullies in the playground, although his mother had been complaining to the school for months about the constant torment Peter was suffering.

Persistent school bullying can result in:

- depression
- low self-esteem
- loneliness
- poor academic achievement
- isolation
- threatened or attempted suicide

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.

When school bullies carry on bullying as adults they run into all sorts of problems. KIDSCHAPSE, sponsored by the COOR, recently carried out a survey of young offenders which indicated that many had been actively involved in bullying at school. Studies have found that adults who were bullies as children have a higher chance than others of acquiring a criminal record, tend to be aggressive, and have problems in maintaining relationships.

SOME MYTHS ABOUT BULLYING

Friends and relatives may say some of the following things to you if you tell them about the bullying. They are well-meaning but wrong. Bullying is NEVER a good thing; it is always damaging, both for the victim and for the bully.

“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 weakness but a recognition that they cannot cope with the situation on their own.

“Tell him to hit back harder.” Bullies are often bigger than their victims so the victim could get seriously hurt by “hitting back.” Hitting back reinforces the idea that violence and aggression are acceptable.

“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 your bones but names can never hurt you.” Bruises left by blows fade and heal but the scars left by name-calling can last for ever. An 84 year old man wrote and told us: “I can remember every word those friends said. I’ve been hearing their bullying jeers all my life.”

“That’s not bullying! It’s just kids teasing.” Teasing is one thing but when it gets out of hand it can turn into vicious taunting. Once teasing begins to hurt the victim it is no longer “just a bit of fun” and should be stopped.
WHY DO SOME CHILDREN BULLY OTHERS?

There are plenty of different reasons why a child may become a bully. Some children may turn to bullying as a way of coping with a difficult situation; the death of a relative, their parents' divorce, or they are just spoilt rotten and bully to get their own way. Some are victims of abuse and take out their humiliation and anger on others; some want to be 'top dog' and are prepared to use aggression and violence to command obedience and loyalty.

Whatever the causes of the bullying, bullies pick on others as a way of making life better for themselves. They are frequently bigger and stronger than their victims and use intimidation to get what they want. They are often not happy and use bullying as a way of trying to achieve popularity and friends.

Bullies have to learn that bullying is unacceptable and that, if they continue to behave unacceptably, then there are consequences. Although they should be given plenty of encouragement and help to change, bullies must not be allowed to get away with tormenting others.

WHAT TO DO IF YOUR CHILD IS THE BULLY

If you learn that your child is a bully:

- 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 teachers, playground supervisors, other parents - the more you can find out about what has been going on, the easier it will be to work out why your child has been bullying and what can be done about it.

HELPING THE BULLYING CHILD

- 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 you don't like but you will work with them to help change this
- find out if there is something in particular which is troubling him or her and try to sort it out

- work out a way for your child to make amends for the bullying
- set up some sort of reward for good behaviour
- set limits. Stop any show of aggression immediately and help the child find other, non-aggressive ways of reacting
- if your child bullies when faced with certain situations, help them work out and practice alternative ways of behaving
- explain that getting away from a situation where they can feel themselves losing their temper, or things getting out of hand, is not weakness. It is a sensible way of ensuring that the situation doesn't get worse
- teach your child the difference between assertive behaviour and aggressive behaviour - use the Assertiveness Section in this booklet
- praise your child when they do things well. Create opportunities for them to shine
- talk to the school staff. Explain that your child is making an effort to change his or her behaviour. Ask what ideas they have to help. It might be helpful for you and your child to talk to an educational psychologist. Ask the school to arrange this
- talk to the staff about setting realistic goals for your child - don't expect too much too soon - and about rewarding him or her when they achieve one of these set goals. Ask if the school can provide a room where the children could go if they feel they need time to 'cool off'.
- other children may deliberately provoke a bully, especially if they think the bully is trying to reform. Explain to your child that they may be teased and provoked but that they should try not to respond aggressively. The child should walk quietly away if they think someone is trying to pick a fight.

Parents can help by controlling their own aggression and by making it clear that violence is always unacceptable.

The KIDSCAPE Beat Bullying! booklet has more suggestions for young people.

WHO ARE THE VICTIMS?

Children who bully pick on people because they need a victim. They will find something about the victim to focus on: wearing glasses.
Having protruding ears, being in a wheelchair, coming from a different culture. Whatever it is, this so-called difference is just an excuse which the bully needs or creates to ‘justify’ his or her behaviour.

The ‘difference’, whatever it is, is not the victim’s fault. Nobody should suffer bullying because of the way they look or because they have a different cultural background to other pupils. Schools should provide environments in which differences are appreciated and children feel valued.

However, we should recognize that some children may be vulnerable to bullying because they may have specific problems such as poor co-ordination, speech or language difficulties. School staff should be made aware that these children may need extra help. In some cases, preparing all the children by discussing issues generally may avoid problems.

SPECIAL NEEDS

If your child has some special needs, he or she may be bullied because other children don’t understand why they look or behave differently. Sometimes the bullying can be worse if the child’s special needs are not immediately apparent (hearing loss or cystic fibrosis, for example). If this is the case with your child, then talk to your child’s teacher about educating the other pupils.

- Find out as much as you can about your child’s special needs - there is usually a support group which can help with information - and suggest that the teacher uses this material to teach the children.
- Suggest that a member of the support group come and talk to the class or school.
- There may be things that other children could do to help, like carrying lunch to the table if a child has a problem with co-ordination or being available to help if asked.
- Contact Disability Information and Advice Line (DIAL) which has names of trainers who provide disability awareness training for schools (see page 19).

RACIAL AND CULTURAL BULLYING

All incidents of racial bullying should be reported immediately to school staff who should investigate without delay. The victim should be reassured and the bullies made to understand that racial harassment of any kind is unacceptable and will not be tolerated.

Section 71 of the Race Relations Act requires local education authorities to make appropriate arrangements to prevent racial harassment occurring, or to deal with it if it happens in spite of their arrangements. Under Section 71 the local education authority is required to provide a non-discriminatory service. This implies the adoption and implementation of a proper policy, monitoring its effectiveness and a full inquiry into any complaint.

Further information and advice is available from the Commission For Racial Equality (see page 13), or from the local Council for Racial Equality, or from the Citizens Advice Bureau.

SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Sexual harassment is not the same as flirting which is part of a mutual ‘getting to know you’ process. Sexual harassment is unwanted attention that makes people feel uncomfortable, attacked or humiliated. It can include unwanted verbal or physical contact or sexual attention, including comments about an individual’s body, suggestive or obscene language or gestures, and derogatory posters, photographs, graffiti or drawings. Sexual harassment is completely unacceptable.

VICTIMS: POSSIBLE SIGNS OF BULLYING

A child may indicate they are being bullied. If your child shows some of the following signs, bullying may be responsible and you might want to ask if someone is bullying or threatening them.

Children may:
- be frightened of walking to or from school
- change their usual route
- not want to go on the school bus
- beg you to drive them to school
- be unwilling to go to school (or be school phobic)
- feel ill in the mornings
- begin muttering
- begin doing poorly in their school work
- come home regularly with clothes or books destroyed
- come home starving (bully has taken dinner money)
- become withdrawn, start sleepwalking, lack confidence