Dear parents,

'Bullying has been around since time began. It equips kids to deal with life. Why do we need advice about how to cope with it?'

Fortunately, the attitude of this person is not shared by the majority of adults. In fact, most adults, especially parents, are concerned to stop bullying and want practical ideas on how to cope with it. Children who are worried about being bullied or who see their friends being bullied have a hard time concentrating on learning. Children who are bullies are seldom our best pupils. The effects of bullying can go on for years.

No child deserves to be bullied. Perhaps by using some of the suggestions in this booklet, we will prevent children from becoming embittered, unhappy and unfulfilled. Bullies, too, have a miserable future in front of them. One study found that bullies were much more likely as adults to be violent, to have committed crimes, to have battered their children and to have difficulty with relationships than children who are not bullies. So we do bullies no favours by ignoring their behaviour.

Yes, bullying has gone on for years - that doesn't make it right. We stuffed children up chimneys and down mines for years - that wasn't right either and we changed it. We can change the attitudes which allow bullying, as well.

Yours sincerely,

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How Parents Can Help

- If you are worried that your child is being bullied, ask him/her directly
- Be aware of the signs and symptoms of bullying (next page)
- Take bullying seriously and find out the facts when told about an incident of bullying
- Don't agree to keep the bullying a secret
- Talk with teacher or headteacher, if it is school bullying
- Give teachers the suggestions in this booklet and point out the resources listed at the back of this booklet
- Institute Kidscape programmes in schools to combat bullying
- Help children practise strategies such as shouting no, walking with confidence and running away
- Give your child a chance to vent his/her feelings about being bullied
- Get other parents together and discuss ways to stop the bullying
- Talk to the parent governors at your school and suggest a school policy on bullying
- Arrange to meet your child, if the bullying is happening on the way to or from school
- Ask that the bullies be kept at school until everyone has had a chance to get home
- If you feel it would help your children's confidence, ask them if they would like to take self-defence classes
- Check that your child is not inviting the bullying by some obnoxious habit, such as spitting, picking his nose, etc
- Keep a written diary of all incidents
- Invite children over to help your child make friends
- If you need help, contact the organisations listed in this booklet.
Bullying – Possible Signs

A child may indicate by signs or behaviour that he or she is being bullied. If you are concerned and become aware of any of the following, you may wish to ask if someone is threatening or bullying your child.

Children may:
- Be frightened of walking to or from school
- Be unwilling to go to school
- Beg you to drive them to school
- Change their route to school
- Begin doing poorly in their school work
- Come home regularly with clothes or books destroyed
- Come home starving (because dinner money was taken)
- Become withdrawn, start stammering
- Become distressed, stop eating
- Attempt suicide
- Cry themselves to sleep
- Have nightmares and even call out ‘leave me alone’
- Have unexplained bruises, scratches, cuts
- Have their possessions go ‘missing’
- Ask for money or begin stealing money (to pay the bully)
- Continually ‘lose’ their pocket money
- Refuse to say what’s wrong
- Give improbable excuses to explain any of the above.

Children and Young People

Suggestions for dealing with bullying:

- Laugh at or ignore comments or teasing. Remember that these people are ignorant. They want your scared reaction and humour or silence might throw them off. You would have to keep it up for awhile and then I think they would get bored.
- You can tell them to buzz off, shout No or go away. But you must say it angrily and walk away immediately. Practise in the mirror.
- If it is a group bothering you, look the weakest one of the group in the eye and say ‘This isn’t funny’ and then walk away.
- You can sign up for self-defence courses which will give you more confidence. These lessons don’t necessarily mean you ‘fight back’, and they can help your confidence.
- Stay with a crowd – bullies usually pick on kids alone.
- Ask one of the gang members when they are alone why they find it necessary to gang up on one person.
Bullies

Some children may become temporary bullies after a traumatic event, such as a divorce, the birth of a new baby, the death of a loved one or because of boredom and frustration.

Other children become chronic bullies because they:
- Like the feeling of power
- Are spoilt rotten and expect everyone to do what they say
- Feel insecure, inadequate, humiliated
- Have been abused in some way
- Are scapegoats or bullied at home
- Are under pressure to succeed at all costs
- Don’t fit in with the other kids
- Feel no sense of accomplishment.

If your child is a bully:
- Remain calm
- Don’t bully or hit the child – it will make it worse
- Try to find out why your child is bullying, but don’t turn it into the Spanish Inquisition
- Talk to teachers, dinner staff, friends and anyone who can give you more information
- If the situation is not serious, give it time to sort itself out
- If it is serious, don’t hesitate to get help. Ask the school to get in touch with the educational psychologist or contact your local Child Guidance Centre
- Set realistic, firm guidelines and rules to help your child control his/her behaviour
- Ensure that your child apologises, either in person or in writing to the child he/she bullied.

Bullies need to achieve some success to make them feel good about themselves. Help them to find something they can do well and often their behaviour will change.
WHAT IFS?

What If? questions can help you think about what to do in case anything should happen. There are no right answers because every case is different. Use the questions with your parents or with friends and decide what you think might work? Think of your own solutions and make up new What If? questions to answer.

1. You are walking to school and a gang of older bullies demands your money, skateboard, trainers, etc? Do you:
   a. Fight them?
   b. Shout and run away?
   c. Give them the money?
   Give them the money (or other possession) – your safety is more important than money.

2. You are on the school playground and someone accidentally trips you? Do you:
   a. Hit the person hard?
   b. Give him or her a chance to apologise?
   c. Sit down and cry?
   Give the person a chance. If it was an accident, then he or she should say sorry.

3. You are in the school toilet and an older student comes in, punches you and then tells you not to do anything or 'you'll get worse'. You know who the person is and you have never done anything to him/her. Do you:
   a. Wait until the person leaves and then tell a teacher?
   b. Get in a fight with him/her?
   c. Accept what happened and don't tell?
   You didn't deserve to be punched and the bully was wrong to do it. If you don't tell, the bully will just keep on beating up other kids.

4. You are walking in the lunch room and someone yells out a negative comment directed at you. Do you:
   a. Ignore it?
   b. Yell back?
   c. Tell?
   You can either ignore it (if it is the first time and that's all that happens) or tell if it really bothers you.

5. A gang of bullies gets you alone and starts beating you. Do you:
   a. Do nothing – just take it?
   b. Fight back?
   c. Shout to attract attention?
   d. Watch for your chance and run away?
   You must decide, but c. & d. together could work very well. It would be quite difficult to fight a whole gang of bullies and you might be hurt badly if you did.

6. Someone in your class always makes rude comments about you and says them loud enough for you (and others) to hear. It really upsets you. Do you:
   a. Ignore the comments?
   b. Confront the bully and tell him/her off?
   c. Tell the teacher?
   d. Punch the bully in the nose?
   You may feel like punching the bully, but you'll probably be the one to get into trouble if you do. Try a. first – ignoring comments is difficult, but can work if the bully gets tired of trying to get you to be angry or cry or show some reaction. Your teacher should be told about the comments because no one should make hurtful comments to others. If you are feeling brave, tell the bully off. Try practising in the mirror to get the right effect!