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By Harry Jivenmukta

# INTRODUCTION: WHY IS BULLYING SUCH A PROBLEM?

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According to recent figures, one in four children is involved in bullying. Or is it 70%? Well, you may feel that nobody in the world is as miserable as you (whether you are a bully or you're being bullied), yet nearly everybody has been bullied at some time or another. This won't make you feel better, *BUT* even impossible problems can be solved, eventually.

Apparently, boys are far more likely to own up to bullying than girls, yet girls, increasingly, can be every bit as vicious and violent, judging by some recent cases. But we've probably all bullied other people, at least kicked the cat once or twice. Bullying is pervasive. Ultimately it affects everyone in school, creating a bad atmosphere which leads to low achievement and stress in both pupils and teachers.

Bullying means different things to different people, according to their resilience, their levels of empathy and tolerance; one person's teasing is another's unbearable cruelty. And who is most in need of help, the villain or the victim? Research shows that a great many bullies go on to be involved in crime and might end up killing somebody; victims could end up killing themselves. Trying to put an end to bullying should mean fewer victims and maybe solve most problems.

Much has been written on the subject, mostly by teachers and parents, covering school and home, the "two social worlds" of the child, which can be very different. But even though these books are based on experience, filled with definitions and suggestions, their upbeat outlook is not always realistic, the advice sometimes contradictory. Besides, many schools seem reluctant to adopt an anti-bullying policy, due to various reasons: image, tradition, poor teaching standards, economics.

Bullies remain unimpressed by attempts to solve the problem, their victims unconvinced; onlookers may well be affected nearly as badly as the victims, even if part of a gang where shared responsibility means their behaviour is less inhibited. For many teenagers, the depth of their idealism is matched by a striking cynicism, a combination which oddly, yet invariably, manifests itself in apathy: "What's the point? It's not going to change anything". Fear of reprisal and humiliation keeps victims and bystanders silenced. It is largely up to parents and teachers to make the first approach, instead of assuming that if somebody is that desperate, they'll ask for help.

**EXERCISE:** Imagine it's years later; you're rich and famous. You bump into somebody who used to torment you. They are unemployed and about to lose their home. You have the power to grant them one thing, whatever they want. What would you do?

# WHAT IS BULLYING? BOYS AND GIRLS: VISIBLE AND INVISIBLE BULLYING.

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Most experts seem to think that unless you come up with the proper definition, you can't solve the problem. So, bullies are either spoilt brats or come from a deprived background and grow up convinced they have to hit out before they get hit. What a bully *IS* and what a bully *DOES* are often stereotyped; books and films may convince you bullies are cowards at heart; in reality, tackling them may mean you're in for a nasty shock.

Bullying is often equated with violence (beating up, punching, hitting, kicking, even pushing and pinching), girls as well as boys; it can be a single, traumatising incident or a campaign. The most insidious thing is the secrecy. Victims suffer in silence, while their parents and teachers often remain oblivious. Yet bullies often require an audience and witnesses should be encouraged to speak out in support of the victim. Bystanders, no matter how distressed they are, stay silent to make sure they are safe. But even if the bully leaves them in peace, more often than not, their conscience won't.

Physical acts are more likely to draw attention, as do tantrums; some bullies seem to go beserk when they lose their temper. Other means include graffiti and the passing of notes, "borrowing" or stealing, damaging or hiding possessions (schoolwork, books, bags, sports equipment, dinner money), exclusion i.e. completely ignoring somebody.

More harmful and more difficult to prove is "invisible" bullying, carried out well away from adult eyes. Threatening gestures, even pulling faces, can really scare some children. Verbal bullying ranges from name-calling, spreading rumours, sarcastic put downs, nagging or mockery. This last is used to humiliate people, mimicking their words, repeating everything that's said in an infuriatingly babyish tone of voice, or imitating mannerisms in an exaggerated fashion.

Boys, largely, seem to resort to visible bullying i.e. physical means; girls frequently get away with using invisible means, carried out more often, more tenaciously, often more ingeniously. Most people usually recover once the bruises fade, but somebody who has to put up with daily insults, their faults, real or imaginary, broadcast to the world, might never get over it. The consequences of such a campaign are far reaching, potentially disastrous and may result in: poor schoolwork, lack of motivation, inability to achieve; shyness, no self confidence, depression; isolation, suicidal tendencies.

**EXERCISE:** Only messing...? List everything which you would call bullying. Ask a couple of friends to do the same and maybe an adult you get on well with. Compare notes e.g.: Is having your things "borrowed" worse than nobody talking to you?

# BULLYING AND PEOPLE WITH SPECIAL NEEDS; RACISM; SEXISM.

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Many of the definitions of “harassment” make it a synonym for bullying: to distress or wear out, to annoy or pester, but somehow, it suggests that the victim is just a little bit irritated (shades of Frank Spencer?). Yet it was once a popular phrase with those of a Politically Correct turn of mind for the nastier sorts of bullying, such as picking on people who are disabled, as well as racism and sexism.

Bullies need victims and focus on what they see as a weak spot in order to torment them. Much is said about equality and how we should strive to achieve it, but it is rarely possible. It’s more important to try and understand that we’re not all the same and strive instead to accept the differences. All bullies justify their behaviour, indeed, seek to gather others on their side by emphasising the differences between “them” and “us”. These may be something as petty as wearing braces or glasses, even unfashionable clothes, to people in wheelchairs or of the opposite sex or from another culture.

Most of us will be self-conscious about anything which makes us different, from temporary measures, such as braces, to disabilities. Many of us, in fact, believe we are a mass of imperfection; too small, too tall, too shy, too fat, too thin, too plain, too stupid, even too clever. We end up convinced these are all really bad things to be, especially if there is somebody only too happy to keep drumming it in - even if they in turn just happen to be too small or too fat themselves.

The world would be a very boring if we were all the same; we should be glad to be individuals. Bullies create problems out of so-called differences, but it helps to understand why:

We are usually afraid of what we do not understand.

We tend to be jealous of people having something we lack or envious because we want to be like somebody else.

We are quick to become angry because of frustration.

We become cruel to prove we are not helpless.

Children can be more vulnerable to bullying simply because of sex, colour or special needs. Bullying can occur because of ignorance, not knowing why a child looks or behaves differently, such as poor co-ordination, while “invisible” disabilities, like hearing loss, can mean more problems.

**EXERCISE:** You and your best mate are messing about, having a mock fight and end up scuffling on the floor. You’re suddenly accused, very loudly, of grabbing them by the whatsits. Now everyone’s going round saying you must be gay. What do you do?

## MYTHS AND LEGENDS ABOUT BULLYING.

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What's your favourite story? How about "schooldays are the happiest days of your life?" Memories of bullying evoke complex, even primitive feelings, although we do tend to shrug it off. Many parents feel a child is honour bound to fight his own battles; asking for help is a sign of weakness (so do children). Our initial reaction is to put it into perspective with all our adult wisdom. But if children screw up their courage to talk to you, at least listen to them carefully:

**"Never did me any harm"**. One middle-aged woman on a literacy course broke down in tears talking about the way her teacher and the other pupils used to jeer at her because she had trouble learning to read. Bullying meant that for years she missed out on enjoying books or magazines.

**"It's character-forming"**. A bit of truth here; if it doesn't kill you, it only makes you stronger. Being bullied does seem to make people more determined to succeed. How many celebrities got to where they are today because of being bullied?

**"Learn to stand up for yourself"**. Good advice if you plan on being a comedian, maybe disastrous otherwise (see Page 20).

**"He must have been asking for it"**. The usual defence. Justification accounts for the bully's feelings of resentment, envy, temper, got-out-of-bed-the-wrong-side-this-morning. Nobody asks to be bullied. And nobody deserves to be bullied.

**"They're only messing"**. Some children simply do not have the imagination to put themselves into somebody else's shoes; if they like dogs, they can't see why some people think they're horrible. But if they hate spiders...so does everyone else.

**"Fight back"**. Even bullies won't hit people they think can hit back even harder. But if you're being bullied finally snap and thump him one, yes, it can be very satisfying; it *MAY* just do the trick as the victorious victim is transformed into hero (especially if it was someone who terrorised the entire class).

But this is real life, not a hit musical; there won't be any chorus line of fellow pupils bursting out into a song and dance routine. More than likely, it just means even more trouble: you now have a reputation live up to and have to fight off *ALL* the bullies; the bully is hellbent on revenge; you may start thinking violence *IS* the answer and be labelled a bully; you're the one who'll end up being blamed by the teachers.

**EXERCISE:** You've gone for a job interview and looks like you've got it - no more money problems. Then your future boss says: "And you may as well forget you've got children, can't be taking time off, even if they're sick". Will you take the job.

# ARE YOU A BULLY?

## WHY DO YOU BULLY OTHER PEOPLE?

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People who bully are generally believed to turn out like that as a result of a combination of personality and upbringing; the probability can be predicted even in young children. Potential bullies are: strong, usually with negative moods, have difficulty in adapting to new situations with irregular, unpredictable eating and sleeping habits. They show no remorse, let alone guilt or shame, lack empathy and self-control, are likely to be hostile, uninhibited and domineering.

We all sometimes lose our temper, snap at people, even threaten them, usually when we feel ill or under pressure or unhappy, but its harder to admit to being a bully than a victim. If you're always behaving like this, maybe it's time to try and think why and ask somebody's help to sort it out?

**ARE YOU UNDER PRESSURE?** Do certain things, particular occasions really bother you? Do you absolutely hate the thought of geography lessons or going to the dentist or things like that? Is it frustrating to do lessons you can't understand? Does your work or your behaviour live up to your teacher's expectations? Do you feel your parents are never pleased no matter how hard you try? Are they fusspots or do they never seem to notice you?

Do you believe in getting in the first shot? Are you and your friends part of a gang of bullies?  
**ARE YOU MISERABLE?** Something at home or at school upsets you?

Do you feel lonely, even when you're with your friends? Do you feel left out? Do you think people do it on purpose? Is somebody picking on you at home or in school? Do you think everybody has got it in for you?

**WHY DO YOU THINK YOU BEHAVE LIKE THIS?** Do you deliberately try to upset, hurt or intimidate people? Do their reactions give you a kick, make you feel satisfied or powerful?

|Is this just one particular person? Why are they so annoying? Do you think they're better than you - cleverer, better looking, more popular? Does your size, age etc. make you feel the odd one out? Or are you better than them? In what way?

Do you ever feel sorry for people? Suppose one of your friends gets into trouble for something they didn't do?

**EXERCISE:** When Eddie Izzard was six, his mother died and he was sent to boarding school where he was regularly beaten by "the teacher from hell". Write a letter telling the person you hate most your feelings.

# WHAT MAKES PEOPLE VICTIMS? DIFFERENCES. REACTIONS.

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Some books object to the term victim and do not investigate which children seem to act as a magnet to bullies (some children never do find out why they were bullied). Even teachers prefer the bully and agree the victim “was asking for it”. Children tolerate eccentricity if it’s amusing, but react to “negative gender image” (tomboys and sissies) by bullying. Any cattiness, and a tomboy’s mates stick up for her; lads seen to be sissies have no chance. Extroverts, who have to be a part of a crowd, willingly become scapegoat or clown; introverts do anything to be left alone in peace and quiet.

Differences spark off bullying, even things as trivial as dress or habits or names - nowadays, maybe Janet and John because their parents “couldn’t be bothered” to come up with something exotic. As for appearance, according to research (and the Media) attractive looks are a definite advantage. Yet the most popular children are those seen to be either strong or cheerful. Poor self image means a child blames his looks for lack of friends and concern over appearance becomes obsessive, especially among teenagers. Yet children with special needs can often stand up to bullying; unfortunately, they’ll have had plenty of practice because encountering disability often makes people insensitive.

Victims seem to fit into two categories:

**PASSIVE:** Timid, easily intimidated. Anxious, cautious, lacking in self-esteem, unable to stand up for herself. Easy pickings like this may make the bully feel guilty so they blame the one who causes them to feel so rotten; they have to be punished.

**PROVOCATIVE:** Irritating, clumsy, restless, hot tempered, confrontational. Can’t resist stirring it, makes things worse.

Victims can be : Sensitive, neurotic, easily upset, highly strung, emotional, passionate, volatile. As with bullies, you can predict which children are likely to be victimised when they grow up: emotional reactions are almost excessive, quickly aroused; they’re jumpy and slow to settle down; blush or turn white easily and have sweaty palms and a fast heartbeat.

The victim invariably bears the whole burden of responsibility yet the bully is the guilty one. He sniffs out our weak spot, turns it into a weapon to expose our insecurity. Our immediate reaction and dismay gives him power. Nevertheless it may just happen that the victim is in the wrong place at the wrong time. Someone determined to bully will pick on anyone; very little can deter them. But it’s their problem, not the victim’s.

**EXERCISE:** What kind of things are really boring? Write a story about having to go to a football match or the ballet.

Unhappy families are described nowadays as “dysfunctional”, a mechanical expression which suggests that everything will work out if only you press the right buttons. Most parents have never been shown what to do and go about it the way they themselves were brought up; they should allow for the fact that their children may behave better with other adults and even find it easier to confide in them. One thing is obvious - unless the parents are happy, how can the children enjoy themselves? Families who lead contented and united lives can withstand most problems, including those which spark off isolated acts of bullying. In unhappy families, frustration and misery are breeding grounds for bullies and victims. A bully growing up in a household where aggression is the norm won't adapt to the outside world. A child blamed for everything takes on this role with everybody else. There are few things harder in life than overcoming negative influences like these.

Children may be affected by their position: the eldest should be more responsible but is treated as a grown up, the baby left out or indulged, the middle child convinced she's badly done to, though probably more independent than the other two; parents learn through trial and error. And jealousy won't be solved by taking pains to treat them all equally because they soon find out that life is unfair. Only children, though often confident, may be singled out for bullying, as will the loner. With girls, parents are apt to panic and try forcing them to mix. Going against her own nature and inclinations is very stressful, making her put on an act, join a bad crowd or become more anti-social. Some children are happier with one or two friends; it can be an asset to enjoy your own company.

The aggressive child and the spoilt brat invariably get their own way because most of us will do “anything for a quiet life”, and the problem behaviour of aggressive and antisocial children is often due to the following factors:

Fathers: Absence; Loss (divorce, rather than death); Mothers: Depression; Loss.

Parents: Irritability; constant discord (quarrelling, fights).

Other: Large family; “disadvantaged” (poverty, environment).

The above factors often have an immediate and marked effect on boys and even more adverse effects on girls in the long run. Far worse than a vicious circle, this becomes a cycle, passing down through the generations. But the better our relationship with our parents, the easier it becomes to mix with our peers.

**EXERCISE:** If you were part of a large family who don't always get on, how would you try to avoid a “them or us” situation?

# BULLYING IN SCHOOL. TEACHERS; BEST FRIENDS.

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It's not big and it's not clever, but it's not surprising some exasperated teachers start bullying, faced with stubbornly silent victims and defiant bullies, adults can be as oblivious as children to the effect their words have on other people. Admittedly, pupils who make a nuisance of themselves get into trouble; it's different when somebody who tries their best is a scapegoat, singled out by the teacher for sarcasm practice.

If you are convinced the teacher is bullying you, you don't have to just lump it. It won't be easy to sort it out, but start by keeping notes: the times you've been picked on, the people who were there; see if they'll back you up. What were the circumstances? How did you feel? You can either tell your parents and ask them to speak to the Headteacher on your behalf or talk to another teacher, one you trust. You could explain what's been happening to the School Nurse, or the School Secretary or the Head of Personal and Social Education.

In playschool, children are more free and easy, changing best friends by the minute and soon get over falling out with their friends. Changing school means finding out where you can best fit in and when girls are part of a crowd, they must conform; usually only boys get away with being individuals and can even have a glamorous image as a loner. For some teenagers, best friendship is almost like a practice run for relationships, though terrible twosomes can get up to five times as much mischief. One child will quite likely be seen as a satellite or a henchman, which may protect them from bullying, yet the stronger personality will have no qualms about tormenting them if they happen to fall out. With lads, it may end with a punch up, which often clears things up and life goes back to normal.

For girls, it can be hell on earth as the unfortunate one is excluded, maybe by the whole class, and for a very long time. If dependent upon her best friend, she may not have any other close friends or becomes so unhappy, she convinces herself that this is the case. Nobody wants to believe that the people we like don't like us and nothing can change it, even if we're daft enough to try bribery or sucking up to them. But do you really want to be friends with somebody as horrible as that?

It is never too soon for a child to learn social skills and the latest thinking is a blessing for working mothers, since they need no longer feel guilty about packing off the toddler to playgroup. One expert insists that fussy mothers mean children who are clingy and (victims) or spoilt brats (bullies) but luckily this may be avoided if they mix with other children.

**EXERCISE:** At your new school, a gang of girls snatch your schoolbooks and say you have to buy them back. The teacher insists you are making excuses. Who can you go to for help?

# DANGER SIGNALS. HOW TO TELL IF SOMEBODY IS BEING BULLIED.

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**CHANGES IN ATTITUDE:** Frightened of walking to school or getting the school bus. Indifferent about doing schoolwork and good marks, or obsessive about cleanliness, possessions, punctuality. No longer looks forward to family treats and doesn't seem to be enjoying them; "in a world of their own"; inattentive; withdrawn; evasive; won't discuss things.

**HEALTH:** Claims they're ill when they get up: stomach upset, headaches, fainting, often end up in sick bay. Loss of appetite, sudden dieting *OR* over-eating (stolen dinner money); stammering; bedwetting; sleeplessness; won't get up; nightmares.

**CHANGES IN BEHAVIOUR:** Takes longer to come home; uses different routes or insists on a lift; begins truanting; comes up with stories, lies, unlikely excuses. Acting unreasonably or aggressively; starts bullying; shows lack of confidence, is more nervous; acts babyish: thumb sucking, nail biting.

**RESULTS** (more obvious signs should always be investigated): Keeps asking to borrow money; "forgets" to hand over change; pockets loose change; shoplifting. Refuses to go to school and won't go out and play or call for friends, go to usual clubs in the evenings or at weekends. Frequently tearful; over-reacts, gets upset over little things. Unexplained cuts, bite marks, scratches, bruises; comes home with possessions (clothes, books, schoolwork, bag, sports equipment) missing, damaged, "loaned". Threatens, keeps talking about or attempts suicide.

## **HOW YOU CAN HELP IF IT'S YOUR BROTHER, SISTER OR FRIEND:**

Discuss what's been going on. Listen carefully and reassure them. Persuade them to tell a teacher or their parents, even if they insist that it doesn't matter and they're OK really.

Offer to speak up on their behalf or find somebody older (or more popular) who will do it for you. This is very hard to do, but you could write a note and leave it where a teacher or parent is bound to see it. Or bring it up in class, to debate in English, Religious Studies, Personal and Social Education.

**DON'T** try and sort it out on your own or go and beat up the bullies, though you and some friends could try warning weaker members of the gang that you know what's going on and will try to stop it. And never tell the victim to just get on with it; they wouldn't ask for help if they didn't really need it.

**EXERCISE:** If you like painting: a self-portrait; someone you admire; someone you despise. Or write a story about each one.

## BULLYING AS A CRIMINAL OFFENCE.

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Most of us have read cases where the local bobby is had up for giving some lad a clip around the ear, but not many people realise that if bullying is physical, victims can press charges. Being aware of this provides some consolation; they need not feel quite so helpless, even if in the long run it actually gets to court and turns out to be a hopeless case - we've all read about them as well. At least bullying, in and out of school, features quite often in the Media these days.

Police response may differ according to the area in which you live. In more rural areas, everybody tends to know everybody else which in itself may curb bullying since it rarely goes unnoticed. Inner city police are more likely to be under pressure and in the first instance, their decision could be to caution the bullies. Be persistent; if you feel you are not being taken seriously, *DON'T* give up. You could try having a word with the Children's Legal Centre (see Page 22).

Even if the bully is not yet ten, the age of criminal responsibility, *ALL* physical assaults should be reported to the police; ask to speak to the Officer in Charge. If bullying has taken place, a charge sheet should be made out. This alone may deter the attacker and makes the victim feel better as he can see that steps have been taken; having managed to confide in an adult, lack of action can be very detrimental to his self-esteem (yet adults may decide to do nothing because "it'll only make matters worse"). Take pictures of the injuries - if bruising is extensive, place a ruler next to the area as photographic evidence. Keep a record of all medical treatment.

Assault charges vary according to the degree of injury:

Verbal Assault = to bring this charge, you need at least one witness, somebody who is prepared to back you up and confirm what happened. In a series of incidents, try using video, cameras or tape recorders (provide proof, acts as a deterrent).

Common Assault = minimal injuries with no cuts or bruises. (Nonetheless, the parents or the victim can ask the Magistrates Court to issue a summons to assailants to answer the charge).

Aggravated Common Assault = Assailant under 14 or a female; under the 1988 Criminal Justice Act (Section 39), children under 16 can be victims of Common and Aggravated Assault.

Actual Bodily Harm (ABH) = bruising, cuts or blood.

Grievous Bodily Harm (GBH) = broken bones, severe bruising or hospital treatment.

GBH With Intent = serious injury, which may result in death.

## SORTING IT OUT. APPROACHING THE SCHOOL.

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Most experts insist parents should never go round to the bully's house; playing hell with them makes matters worse. But, depending on the situation, there should be some way of letting them know about it before you tackle the school. When you make an appointment with the school, ask to speak to either the form teacher or a teacher whom your child trusts and gets on well with. Start keeping a diary, noting all the incidents, especially visits to the doctor. Keep copies of letters; written records mean facts can easily be checked, it's not just one person's word against another's, and the details are clear in your head when you speak to the teacher; be assertive, *NOT* aggressive (see Page 17). Offer to help, maybe playground duty or to set up a support group. The head of year and the headteacher should also be informed about the meeting.

The follow up meeting, a week later, should assess the situation. What has the teacher found out and what action is the school intending to take? Even if your not happy with their suggestions, which could include assessment by School or Educational Psychologist, give them a try. And your demand for hefty punishment may not be seen as useful as sanctions. If bullying continues, ask to speak to the Head Teacher (it may help to bring someone along for support). Make a list of the points to be clarified: how has the school dealt with bullying? Do they have an anti-bullying policy? Any problems making appointments (inconvenience...or being fobbed off?), write a letter. Let everyone know what's been going on; if necessary, talk to your church, the Citizen's Advice Bureau, Samaritans.

The next step is the Board of Governors and they will have a Parent representative you should be able to contact. Or talk to the Chair; their name and address is available from the School Secretary and just requesting it may be enough to galvanise the school into action. If the address is not forthcoming, the letter should be addressed to the Chair via the school. The Governing Body is legally bound to hear your complaint, but you can also write to the local Director of Education, whose name can be supplied by your Town Hall.

You can go higher still: The Secretary of State for Education, Sanctuary Buildings, Great Smith Street, London SW1 (likewise Grant Maintained Schools). This is a formal complaint; ask them to use their powers under Sections 68 and/or 99 of the Education Act 1944 because you believe the school to be acting unreasonably and failing in its "duty of care". At this stage, contact your MP for help, or the Town or County Councillor and make an appointment to see them at their surgery. If no further forward, you may have to consider a transfer to another school or to have your child educated at home. This is quite legal and he can stay there for the duration of a sick note if too distressed to attend school.

# HOW CAN TEACHERS STAMP OUT BULLYING? SCHOOL POLICY.

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All schools have been supplied with a copy of the SCRE's "Action Against Bullying" pack (see Page 22/23) - according to the Government: "The single most important thing a school can do to prevent bullying is to have a clear policy to which staff, pupils and parents are committed". An anti-bullying policy lays down procedures with which everyone is in agreement so that fewer problems arise when implementing them. Everyone throughout the school should be made aware of the policy and pupils given a clear understanding of the consequences if bullying continues. In general, guidelines are as follows:

**ALL**, complaints should be taken seriously and investigated. All those involved: bullies, victims, witnesses should be interviewed separately. Appropriate action should be taken.

**BULLIES:** should make apologies and return items or compensate for their loss. Sanctions may also be imposed and their parents should always be informed. They should be offered help to encourage them to change their behaviour (before they start having a go at teachers, especially novices). They could then be given extra responsibilities: monitoring, mentoring.

**VICTIMS:** Helped to help themselves - not over-protected measures, nor anything which makes them feel stupid or inadequate. Arrange for them to be befriended by a more popular child, but watch the victim doesn't become dependent; offered a support teacher and provided with a safe haven during break and lunch-time (maybe organised activities/events can also be set up). Parents informed, counselling provided as required.

**OTHER PUPILS:** The school should hold a debate about the situation, encourage feedback via assemblies or class discussions or during lessons. Perhaps draw up a contract for pupils to sign promising to report incidences of bullying or provide a special box so they can leave information anonymously. "Bully Courts" may seem to be the answer but are difficult to implement successfully without an experienced teacher and proper resources. Student councils will probably be more useful or a survey carried out by the pupils, since open discussion helps squash the myth about sneaking.

**SCHOOL:** Keep written records: original incident, interviews, action, results. All members of staff (auxiliary i.e. dinner ladies, janitor, as well as teachers) should be kept informed. Arrange follow-up meetings with the victim's family and the bully's family to report progress and monitor the situation.

**EXERCISE:** With your friends, draw up a list of the main problems and see what solutions you can come up with.

## YOU CAN STOP BULLYING, WITH A LITTLE HELP FROM YOUR FRIENDS.

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Behaviour which is rewarded is difficult to alter. Somebody who still throws a wobbler when he spots the sweets at the check-out counter and always receives a bar of chocolate (like he did when he was a toddler in the “Terrible Twos” stage and didn’t know any better) is bound to come to the conclusion that’s the way to get what you want - as well as making an early start at bullying his family.

But as you grow up, leave school and go out into the wide world, what you think of as sticking up for yourself is usually seen as aggression. The main problems about being a bully are:

There will always be somebody who is an even bigger bully.

You are unlikely to have any real friends or be able to form good relationships.

You are likely to end up one sad person, lonely and miserable.

So you want to do yourself a big favour? If you are genuinely sick of bullying, you’ll still find it very hard to stop doing it; all habits are difficult to give up. You’ll need support, advice and encouragement from other people. You need somebody you can trust to talk to and help you make things clearer by listening while you get some of your problems off your chest. Maybe they’ll warn you when you’re letting a situation get out of hand or take you somewhere quiet to cool down. Or make you feel better when you’re convinced you’ll always be a bully and everybody is always going to hate you.

One of the first recommendations to show good intentions are genuine is one of the hardest: making amends to your former victims. Like confessions, apologies can be good for the soul. Sometimes. It helps resolve problems and make you feel better as well, ready to make a new start. You could try befriending them or someone else, who’s being picked on by another bully. Good relationships can come out of bad situations, once you get to know people better and they learn they can trust you.

But you can’t expect to like everyone, any more than you can expect everyone to like you; there are people it seems impossible to be polite or pleasant to, let alone like (just don’t go bullying them). But you’re trying to turn over a new leaf, not to acquire a halo; if they really do irritate you that much, try and keep out of their way. They’ll probably be quite relieved, after all, putting on an act and being nice to them will annoy the hell out of you and probably frighten the life out of them. This is not in the Politically Correct Charter but we do not live in a perfect world and having to pretend to like somebody is a real pain. At least in being honest, you’re being true to yourself.

# YOU CAN STOP BULLYING - WITH A LITTLE HELP FROM YOUR FAMILY.

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Many children run away from home thinking nobody would even notice, convinced their family couldn't care less about them. Lack of communication and inability to negotiate causes lots of problems, especially bullying. Your parents probably love you very much indeed but it's easy to take people for granted and assume they know how you feel. Once you've decided to try and sort out your problems, you and your parents need to talk:

Believe them when they say they love you and will try and help, even if they're horrified at first. Try being honest; edited versions cause loads of trouble once the truth comes out. Besides, we all exaggerate ever such a teeny little bit to make us look better and gloss over things which make us look bad.

Explain to them how disappointed you feel if they never give you credit for anything. Not everybody is lavish with praise, even when they are really pleased about what you have achieved because they think it's showing off to display satisfaction when you've done something well. Conversely, some people are never reassured, no matter how much you praise them.

What will help you to stop bullying? Why do you do it anyway? Ask them to help you to stop being aggressive and to find better ways of reacting, develop more self-control. Everybody needs some guidelines because you can't achieve much without motivation, and for that, you need to learn self-discipline.

Life is *NOT* easy; have they noticed you become aggressive when faced with awkward situations? Do you make a huge fuss, for example, when expected to visit your relations? You can't try compromise if you just sit there sulking, but if it really is that bad, maybe they would agree to leave half an hour earlier?

Explain why it is so difficult to avoid trouble by walking away from it. What about your reputation? Will your mates really think you're chicken? Does it look like you're a bigger wimp?

You have to allow for the fact that if you are trying to reform, some people will make a point of provoking you or picking on you. Making it up to the victims is *VERY* hard, but it should be a bit easier with your parents' advice and support.

Hardest of all - maybe you've picked up bad habits from your parents? Good luck with this one because guess what? Even the most delicate hint that somebody is aggressive will make them overreact and lose their temper. If you can't approach anyone in the family, your grandparents, maybe, or an aunt or uncle, you'll need help from a sympathetic teacher or family friend.

**EXERCISE:** Rock and Roll Suicide... imagine your favourite singer is going to end it all. What can you say to stop them?

## HOW YOU CAN STOP BULLYING - AND HELP YOURSELF

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So why should people trust you? How do they know you're not suddenly going to turn on them again? But actions speak louder than words and it's much easier to show everyone you mean it - by being helpful. It may be boring, but at least it makes everything else more enjoyable; you'll be better off choosing things that won't have you resenting the waste of time and energy or make people resentful because you expect them to be grateful for ever. Don't frighten your parents offering to wash the dishes after Sunday dinner - if you're starving and there's no biscuits left, nip down to the shops, save your Mum a job.

Many schools like older pupils to keep an eye on newcomers, a good chance for you to try out your new role, but be prepared for other people to warn them about your bullying and don't get upset. If your protegee sticks up for you, it proves you're doing OK. Get a job, or do some voluntary work. Charity shops always need assistants (and they're full of bargains). Something livelier? Go down to the library (big building, lots of books) or look in the local paper to find out about activities in your area. What do you enjoy doing? What about the Youth Club? Join a society of some kind, get involved. Busy people don't have time to be miserable or cause misery.

Most of all, you need to learn how to get the better of your aggression. Take it step by step and be realistic when setting yourself targets; giving yourself tasks which are hard to accomplish will put you off, but give yourself a treat each time you get it right, no matter if it's a little thing like not biting somebody's head off or ignoring those *STUPID* comments she keeps coming out with. Try control techniques:

Think about the things and situations which make you angry. Once you can tell what's likely to get you going, be prepared to avoid them. You're the one in control.

Count to ten. Concentrate on calming down. Take several very deep breaths, breathing out each time as slowly as you can. Breathing is so natural to us (obviously) we underestimate it - learning to breathe properly makes an astonishing difference, from everyday, when you can stop yourself feeling angry or nervous or sick, to improving performance (weight-training).

Simple relaxation exercises can be good for you. Lie down and get comfortable: start with your toes, slowly tense and relax each muscle in your body; gently stretch your arms and legs before you get up. And there must be one exercise you like which will do you good? Views are divided on competitive sports like football which may cause even more aggression but many sports help work it off and make you feel good when you're playing well. Or you can just go dancing or take a walk.

Solutions to bullying and being bullied are very similar, since the main reason for both is low self-esteem. This leads to low self-image, seeing yourself as a bad person *AND* believing this is how others see you. If not sorted out, you'll behave badly and be treated badly because you know this is what other people expect. Everybody's reactions are assertive, aggressive or passive. Passive means you think everyone else is far more important, but being aggressive is the exact opposite - it's what *YOU* want that matters. To be assertive means you respect yourself and others. Being self-assertive teaches you negotiation, more appropriate ways of responding when faced with something difficult or upsetting. Once able to overcome these situations, it helps you to feel better about yourself.

**LOSING YOUR TEMPER:** Do you always cry over spilt milk? If you lost every single thing you own in a flood - then what would you do? It's hard not to take it out on the person nearest to you - even if you're mad at somebody else. At first you may have to pretend to be calm but this is good practice; eventually you should find that you don't lose your temper so often.

**SAYING NO:** We all have this right but we still hate doing it, especially if somebody is nagging us for an answer or we don't want to upset them (because they might take it out on us?). You can always ask for more time to think, or more information or come up with another suggestion: "I'm really too knackered to go round the shops. Let's watch a video instead?" You don't always have to do everything everybody wants - but are you deliberately saying "No" to upset them? Turning down something you like, just for that reason, is cutting off your nose to spite your face and the only person you hurt is yourself.

If you want to avoid an argument, try simply saying "No" or "No, I'm afraid I can't". Don't bother with long explanations or complicated excuses to justify your reasons, even if they're true. The other person will not be impressed or sympathetic.

**MAKING REQUESTS:** Do you know exactly what you want and why? Keep to the point; maintain eye contact. Rehearse what you're going to say. And don't take it personally if your request is turned down; if that's always your immediate reaction, people may well give in to you. They'll resent it, though, and you'll likely get a flat refusal when it's something you really need.

Every single person has certain basic rights: To be treated with respect; to be listened to and taken seriously; to ask for more information; to say they don't understand; to make mistakes, and take responsibility for them; not to be expected to take the blame for other people's. To say no and to ask for what you want, without feeling selfish or guilty. And other people also have that same right.

## BUILDING UP SELF-ESTEEM: SUGGESTIONS FOR PARENTS.

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“Poor old Hamlet, he wasn’t half picked on by his Uncle Claudius and the whole court, but there again, he was pretty nasty himself to Ophelia and his mother. Discuss”.

Making use of Literature and the Arts is often recommended as a means to combat bullying since it can encourage discussion between parents (or teachers) and children, as can storytelling, if based on tales of your schooldays, reminiscing about the bullying that went on then. Reading books with your children helps them talk about their fears if they’re starting or changing school, while older children may be comforted to find they are not alone and there could be quite a simple solution. But do not force a child who isn’t keen on reading to struggle with a book. And even if they do read it, don’t assume that’s all the problems solved or that you’ve done your bit; more positive action will probably be needed.

Whilst wholly in agreement with the value of reading, I have not included a great long list of books - name me one novel which does *NOT* have a villain who isn’t a bully? As for drama this is now often used as part of a school’s anti-bullying policy, role playing being more effective than classroom discussions (see Page 23; this is something you could try at home); it provides greater opportunity for channelling aggression and creating empathy and builds up self-esteem.

**SUGGESTIONS FOR PARENTS:** Talk to your child. Reassure them, tell them how much you love them, you’re completely on their side and they’re not to blame. Spend some time together, doing something you both enjoy (no, not sat there watching “The Terminator”; some kind of activity). You will soon see a big improvement if you give them your full attention even for a few minutes every day. This, incidentally, recommended by all the experts, is something my daughter pointed out, aged 16.

Some children have the most colossal chip on their shoulder; they’re always *SO* badly done to. Make allowances for this and negative responses or attention-seeking. Very low self-esteem means a strong sense of failure and children need help to get out of their self-destructive role. Annoyed if complimented, they may even spoil what ever they’ve been praised for doing, yet seem pleased when told off. Or they deliberately behave badly, remaining indifferent to treats or trying to spoil them.

Make sure they have plenty of opportunity to do things well, even simple chores. Give them responsibility. All of this helps them to feel important and that they are valued. Praise them whenever possible, reward them with little treats. (I loathe cooking, but love home-made food, so the occasional batch of scones convinces them I’ve turned into Mrs. Doubtfire).

## BUILDING UP SELF-ESTEEM: SUGGESTIONS FOR PARENTS

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Explain that tears and tantrums encourage bullying because they can look hysterically funny. Warn them to avoid tricky situations, stick with a group and no hanging around corridors, changing rooms, the loo or deserted parts of the playground.

Encourage them to stand up for themselves. Think up responses and practice saying them and how to say “No”. Tell them to stay calm and try to ignore the bully. Assure them it’s sensible to walk away, not cowardly. Don’t let them take valuables into school, though they should hand over money or possessions if they have to rather than get a beating. Make sure they understand you will not go completely bananas if that pen you bought them specially has been “borrowed”. They should know that their safety is what is important. This kind of incident, however, should always be reported to the school.

**SUGGESTIONS FOR TEENAGERS:** What do you like to do best? It’s about time you started being good to yourself. Try and find the time to take up some of your old interests again. Develop your skills, learn new ones on courses or night school. Join local societies; mixing with people who have the same interests encourages you to be sociable. Ask somebody to coach you if something’s tricky or you want to know more; in turn, offer to help people who have problems with things you find dead easy. Get into the habit of paying compliments and accept them graciously. What about a pet? Rottweilers are probably going quite cheap, although cats are a lot more fun.

Groups aren’t for everyone, but there’s plenty you can do on your own. Do you love reading? Then try and be more analytical. What are your favourite books and why? Why does everything go wrong for the heroine? How does the hero sort things out? What do you think should happen to the villain? Who’ll look after the gerbil? (So you are paying attention?).

A diary helps clear things in your mind, makes solutions more obvious. If you loathe writing, just jot down notes, even single words like “BOTHER!” can make you feel a bit better (especially if the pencil breaks and the paper rips in the process and you round it off by punching hell out of your pillow). If you love writing, turn out reams of poetry, short stories, plays, songs (we all love music).

What about scrapbooks? Is your room a shrine to the Manics or the Wildhearts - collect reviews of your favourite band’s new record, or write one yourself, get hold of a computer with desk top publishing facilities and create a fanzine. If your more into the visual, explore Art, try different techniques. Borrow a video camera, write a script, act. Be a star!

**EXERCISE:** List five of your faults and tell yourself off; what would you dread most to hear people saying? List five good points (and don’t be giving up half way). Imagine somebody you admire and how they might compliment you on your achievements.

## STICKING UP FOR YOURSELF: VERBAL DEFENCES.

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A soft answer can turn away wrath, especially if you're being picked on, and your reply really is "soft", as in daft. When bullies attempt to cut you down to size with loud, nasty comments, they expect protests or whinging or floods of tears. They certainly don't think you'll respond with noncommittal remarks or placid agreement. Even better if you can ignore it or laugh it off; many comedians reckon they started off by learning to clown around to avoid trouble or to get out of it?

What is important is having the confidence to respond and silly jokes are probably best. Being quick-witted is all very well, but there's a very fine line between using your initiative and being a smartarse; you can trip up very easily if you have a big mouth and get yourself into a lot of trouble. If you think you can deal with bullies by poking fun at them, you'd better learn to run like hell. It is also very easy to get into the habit of making snappy responses to everything and if you are continually sneering, there's no quicker way of annoying people. Now *YOU'RE* bullying, because being sharp-tongued means you make people look stupid in front of everyone.

"Kidscape" (see Page 22) describes "the broken record" technique to deal with taunts: you simply say thank you, every single time, until the bully gives up out of boredom. Then there's "fogging", where you sort of swallow up insults by keeping your responses noncommittal. This kind of attitude is not at all what a bully anticipates; it puzzles them but should make you feel safer, so it gives you more confidence. It can be very effective, if you keep your replies short and sweet: "Maybe"; "Suppose so"; "You said it"; "That's right". You can practice this in front of a mirror, using various tones of voice each time; you'll realise what a difference it can make: angrily; impatiently; mockingly; quietly; agreeably; casually.

Stonewalling is similar but here you make no verbal response at all. Simply become totally absorbed in something else much more interesting: look at your watch and make it clear you are involved in complicated calculations; stare at the book on your desk and try to learn it by heart. If cornered by a bully, stare over their shoulder, mentally revising multiplication tables. This is not, however, guaranteed to work every time. In theory, bullies aren't going to bother about people who remain completely indifferent to them and who can convince them that they really do not care. But they may become completely obsessed with finding away of provoking a reaction of some kind. In this sort of situation, you must get help from the school as soon as possible. Luckily, most people really do have better things to do with their time.

**EXERCISE:** Watch stand up comedy or sitcoms; what do hecklers say and how are they put down? Rehearse some of your own.

## SELF-DEFENCE. REASONS FOR TAKING IT UP. TYPES OF CLASSES.

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Boxing used to be one of the usual recommendations when a lad was being bullied. Nowadays, there are more exotic choices with a wide range of Martial Arts, which is handy since girls can also participate. And you do not even have to be seen to excel at such pursuits, just let it be common knowledge that you attend classes; that should guarantee you'll be left in peace. More important in being adept, however, is that such interests give children a chance to develop and achieve, improving their self-confidence. Most people have a kind of macho view of martial arts, which is a helpful misconception; these classes are very disciplined and start by teaching self-control so they can also help bullies channel their aggression.

If you live in or near a city, you may have quite a bewildering choice to make:

Age 6: Judo, which is perhaps the most familiar.

Age 8: Karate is very disciplined, more suitable for older children. Aikido; Kung Fu; Tae Kwon Do.

Age 10: Ju-Jitsu is the oldest fighting art and most effective means of self-defence.

Also, Kendo or Iaido (the art of swordsmanship) - equipment can mean heavy expenditure.

**NOT:** Kickboxing (Thai Boxing) or Ninjutsu. The idea is to help victims and bullies, not turn them into amphibians or budding film stars.

When choosing a class, make sure that the instructor's qualifications include teaching; classes should be divided according to age and size, but not overcrowded; equipment well maintained; good atmosphere. Martial Arts, however, do not teach you how to avoid dangerous situations or dealing with them using non-physical means. 12 year olds and upwards may be better off at a self-defence class; some do cater for children, but more often they are restricted to girls and women.

And it must always be made clear that in law, anyone who is physically attacked may use only "reasonable force" to defend themselves - otherwise they are the ones liable to be had up for assault. A good class, both Martial Arts and Self-Defence, will teach skills which are safe when practiced under supervision, but the danger here is pupils who convince themselves they are Bruce Lee reincarnated; accidents can easily happen if they start showing off to their friends or get involved in an argument or a fight in the playground. These techniques should never be used outside the club *UNLESS* the situation warrants it: if you believe you are in real danger, and that unless you defend yourself, you will be badly hurt or taken away against your will.

## FURTHER INFORMATION AND READING.

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### ORGANISATIONS

“KIDSCAPE”: 152 Buckingham Palace Road, London SW1W 9TR (0171 730 3300; Michelle Elliott). A charity for the protection and safety of children. Booklets include: “Preventing Bullying: A Parent’s Guide”; “You Can Beat Bullying: A Guide for Young People”. Send large SAE for free leaflets and more details.

SCOTTISH COUNCIL FOR RESEARCH IN EDUCATION, 15 St. John Street, Edinburgh EH8 8JR (0131 557 2944). Every school has a copy of their pack “Action against Bullying”. Other packs available include “Bullying - a guide for families”. £3.25.

### COUNSELLING : (HELPLINES)

CHILDLINE: Freephone for under 18s: 0800 1111

INTERLINK: Helpline for children: 01504 271257

OPUS (Organisation for Parents Under Stress): 01268 757077

SAMARITANS: 012753 532713; see Phone Book for local branch.

### COUNSELLING ORGANISATIONS:

CHILDWATCH, 206 Hessle Road, Hull, N. Humberside, HU3 3BE (01482 325552). Also for adults suffering after-effects of childhood abuse. Child Protection Pack (£1.50 incl. p+p)

YOUTH ACCESS, Magazine Business Centre, 11 Newarke Street, Leicester LE1 5SS (01162 558763).

### SUPPORT GROUPS HELP LINES

PARENT NETWORK: 0171 485 8535 (local parent support groups)

PARENTLINE: 01268 757077. As above.

### SUPPORT GROUPS:

ANTI-BULLYING CAMPAIGN, 10 Borough High Street, London SE1 9QQ (0171 378 1446). For parents of bullied schoolchildren. Factsheet available (£1 plus A4 SAE).

CHILDREN’S LEGAL CENTRE, 20 Crompton Terrace, London N1 2UN (0171 359 6251). Advice on legal matters.

EXPLORING PARENTHOOD, Latimer Education Centre, 194 Preston Road, London W10 6TT (0181 960 1678). Information and advice on various issues, including school bullying; provides helpline, workshops, free leaflets. Send SAE for details.

VICTIM SUPPORT: Cranmer House, 39 Brixton Road, London SW9 6DZ (0171 735 9166). Individuals are welcome to contact them though most referrals come from the Police. Future plans include specialist workers in most areas, providing emotional support, practical advice and information.

### HOME EDUCATION:

THE CHILDREN’S HOME-BASED EDUCATION ASSOCIATION, 14 Basil Avenue, Armthorpe, Doncaster DN3 2AT. Home education.

## FURTHER INFORMATION AND READING.

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EDUCATION OTHERWISE, 36 Kinross Road, Leamington Spa, Warwickshire CV32 7EF; 01926 886828.

### BOOKS:

#### BULLYING

“The Bullying Problem: How to Deal with Difficult Children”, Alan Train. Souvenir Press (Human Horizons Series). 1995. £9.99. Also, “Helping the Aggressive Child”, 1993.

“Bullies and Victims in Schools”, Valerie E. Besag. Open University Press. 1989.

“Helping Children Cope with Bullying”, by Sarah Lawson. Sheldon Press, Marylebone Road, London NW1 4DU. 1995. £5.99.

#### PARENTING

“A Practical Guide to Talking with Children”, Michelle Elliott. Hodder & Stoughton. 1988.

“Fighting, Teasing and Bullying”, Dr John Pearce. HarperCollins (Thorsons) 77-85 Fulham Place Road, Hammersmith, London W6 8JB. 1989. £3.99.

“Getting on with your Children”, Carol Baker. Longman. 1990.

Positive Parenting: Series of Handbooks published by Hodder & Stoughton (Headway).

#### STORYTELLING, STORY CIRCLES:

“The Heartstone Odyssey”. Contact: Allied Mouse Ltd., 1st floor, Logden Court, Spring Gardens, Buxton, Derbyshire, SK17 6BZ.

#### VIDEOS

“Only Playing, Miss” by Penny Casdalgi & Francis Gobey. Video (£39.95); playscript (£2.50); workshop details & book (£9.99): all plus p+p. Neti-Neti, 44 Gladsmuir Road, London N19 3JU.