

## BULLYING

**Bullying is** the deliberate desire to hurt, threaten, frighten or belittle someone. Due to unhappy and violent histories many of our young people will have developed the low self-esteem that can show itself as bullying behaviour or victim behaviour. This behaviour may be in the form of name-calling, verbal or written abuse or physical assault. It is important to the future well being of any of those involved in bullying; victim or perpetrator, that this behaviour is challenged and that victims are protected.

Warning signs:

- Visible distress
- Difficulty sleeping
- Listlessness
- Fear of going out, to school etc
- Constant small illnesses
- Bruising or tearing of clothes
- Loss of appetite or interest

This list is only a sample of some of the effects of bullying. You will need to watch out for these signs, listen to what is said around you and be aware of the attitudes of the young people in your home towards each other.

The following are some practice guidelines which you may find helpful in dealing with any bullying;

1. **Listen** to what is said to you by young people about bullying they have experienced or witnessed.
2. **Encourage discussion** in the family about the unacceptability of this behaviour and ensure that all young people know that it will not be tolerated in this home.
3. **Separate and protect** any young person who complains of being bullied. This may only be possible on a temporary basis e.g. moving bedrooms, accompanying young people to school,
4. Sending the alleged perpetrator away for the evening or night to a friend ( whilst trying not to make this appear as a reward)

5. **Provide privacy** for the young person to tell you their story. Take their feelings seriously and ask them what they would like to happen. Ensure you do not promise anything that you cannot fulfil. Remember to keep an open mind until you have heard all sides.
6. **Speak to the alleged bully, ensuring that you provide similar privacy and attention.** Listen to their story and take their feelings seriously, check where the stories agree and where they do not.
7. **Speak to any witnesses**, privately.
8. **Clarify the versions with the victim and the bully separately.** Sometimes this process alone will clarify events, sometimes you will need to make a judgement and act accordingly. Decide on a sanction for the bully.
9. **Discuss with the victim ways of handling the situation** help them find the strength and humour to cope by offering strategies. Follow up on any suggestions they have made in earlier discussions. Find out if they wish or are able to have a joint meeting with you and the bully.
10. **Bring the two together.** Explain what your decision is and what it is based on, and encourage both sides to talk openly to each other. Try to help the bully to take responsibility for his/her actions and include the longer-term desire to shake hands and accept an apology. It may be possible to agree a written or verbal contract with both parties in order to keep the conversation positive. If a joint meeting is not possible ensure that both sides are aware of any sanction you are imposing and that bullying will not be tolerated in this family.

If you believe that there may be a problem with bullying outside the home e.g. at school, you should talk to the relevant involved adults, make them aware of the situation and discuss the best way forward.

Please ensure that you keep a record of this process in case of future occurrences and in order to brief the respective social workers.

#### **NB**

**If this behaviour continues, is sexual or seriously abusive, please discuss this with your social workers, a decision will need to be made about whether to involve the child protection systems.**