

Bullying

Advice for Parents of
Deaf Children



Our vision is of a world
without barriers for
every deaf child

Purpose

This booklet provides guidance to parents of deaf children on bullying. It includes:

- information on the steps you and your child can take to minimise the likelihood of bullying
- information to help you identify whether your child is being bullied (or is bullying another child) at school or in the wider community
- ideas to help your child develop the skills and knowledge to be able to react and get help if they are being bullied
- what action to take if you suspect that bullying is already taking place.

Note: the word 'deaf' is used to refer to all types and levels of hearing loss.

NDCS has also published resources on bullying for teachers and deaf children and young people. These are available online at www.ndcs.org.uk/bullying or you can order them by calling the NDCS Freephone Helpline on **0808 800 8880** or emailing helpline@ndcs.org.uk.

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Acknowledgements

This guidance has been written by NDCS with support from families with deaf children. NDCS would like to thank all the families who contributed to the development of this publication by agreeing to tell their stories for the case studies or by taking part in focus groups. We would also like to thank the Anti-Bullying Alliance SEND Project for their support in developing this resource.

Introduction

What is bullying?

The Anti-Bullying Alliance defines bullying as:

“the repetitive, intentional hurting of one person or group by another person or group, where the relationship involves an imbalance of power.”

It is often motivated by prejudice against particular groups, for example, on the grounds of race, religion, gender, sexual orientation or disability.

Children can be bullied by adults as well as by other children.

Types of bullying

All of the following are types of bullying:

- **verbal:** name-calling, insulting, teasing, ridiculing
- **emotional/indirect:** ignoring or deliberately excluding, spreading rumours or nasty stories, turning friends against the child, laughing at them or talking about them behind their back, taking, hiding or damaging their personal belongings, drawing unkind pictures of the child, using a feature of the child's disability to bully them, e.g. deliberately making loud noises near a deaf child who is known to find loud noises unpleasant, creeping up on them from behind to scare them, deliberately making a noise when the teacher is giving instructions.
- **physical:** any physical contact which would hurt such as hitting, kicking, pinching, pushing, shoving, tripping up, pulling out hearing aids.
- **manipulation/controlling behaviour:** using the child's vulnerability as a way of controlling them or making them do something the bully wants them to do.
- **cyberbullying:** using electronic media (internet, mobile phones) to bully someone. This includes bullying through text messages, instant messaging, email, chat forums, online games and social networking websites.

Why might deaf children be bullied?

We know from talking to families that most deaf pupils enjoy their time at school. However, whilst any child can be a victim of bullying, there is evidence to suggest that children with disabilities can be more vulnerable to bullying than others. In 2010, research at the University of Cambridge found that pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities are disproportionately at risk of being bullied.¹ They also found that children who have difficulties with social and communication skills can be more likely to be targeted for bullying.

¹ McLaughlin, C., Byers, R. and Peppin Vaughan, R. (2010) *Responding to Bullying among Children with Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities*.

All of the following, related to difficulties with language, communication and social skills, could make a deaf child more vulnerable to bullying:

- not understanding what's going on in lessons or break time
- not understanding jokes or not being as aware as their peers of youth culture, which stops them from fitting in
- finding it hard to make friends
- appearing immature because their deafness and accompanying language difficulties may make it more difficult for them to acquire social skills and keep up with the things that their hearing peers are interested in
- being more direct than hearing peers
- being less able to pick up on social cues, both verbal and non verbal, for example, a sarcastic comment or tone of voice. This might make it more difficult to fit in and more difficult to recognise when they are being bullied
- speech which is different from that of peers
- reduced ability to stand up for themselves or verbally defend themselves
- spending more time on the internet (because they feel more comfortable communicating that way than face to face), which may make them more vulnerable to cyberbullying.

Other factors which might make deaf children more vulnerable include:

- appearing physically different because of the visible presence of hearing aids, implants and radio aids
- missing more school than other children because of hospital or audiology appointments, which could increase their isolation
- teaching arrangements which increase their isolation or emphasise their difference (e.g. being taught separately from peers, being given different work or being supported by a teaching assistant)
- negative attitudes of others towards any kind of disability
- lack of deaf awareness among staff and other children
- a history of over-protection by adults, meaning that they have little experience of standing up for themselves or defending themselves within their peer group²
- some deaf children might be more vulnerable to low self-esteem and anxiety.

Later in this resource, we set out some of the ways in which you can reduce the likelihood that your child might be a victim of bullying.

² Moore, S. (2009) *Children Who Have Experienced Bullying: performance pointers NI 69. Dartington: Research in Practice.*



What are the signs that a child is being bullied?

It is important not to assume that all deaf children are going to be bullied, but it's sensible to be mindful of signs that it might be happening, especially since some children may not report if they are being bullied or are unable to because of communication or learning difficulties. Other children can be good at hiding their feelings.

All of the following could be clues that your child is being bullied:

- difficulties sleeping
- becoming withdrawn
- bed-wetting (where this has not previously been a problem)
- reluctance to go to school (or wherever the bullying is taking place, such as a sport or youth club), maybe faking illness to avoid it
- being frequently late for school (where lateness has not previously been an issue)
- doing less well at school
- changing, or wanting to change, their route to school or the time they set off
- being aggressive towards family members, teachers and/or other children, or showing bullying behaviours themselves
- coming home with cuts and bruises or with damage to clothing or belongings
- coming home hungrier than usual (which might indicate that their packed lunch or lunch money is being taken)
- 'losing' belongings or money
- wanting to distance themselves from obvious signs of deafness or difference, for example, not wanting to wear hearing aids or not wanting to be supported in class.

Coming home hungrier than usual (which might indicate that their packed lunch or lunch money is being taken)

Ideas for reducing the likelihood of bullying

How to reduce the likelihood of your child being bullied

There are a number of steps that can be taken to reduce the risk of your child being bullied.

These steps could include:

- helping your child to develop emotional resilience and build confidence and self-esteem
- talking regularly with your child about everyday feelings and events so that this kind of discussion becomes quite normal, making it easier for your child to tell you if they do have a problem because they will have the vocabulary and confidence to do so
- supporting your child to develop their social and communication skills
- if you have a choice, choosing a school which shows positive attitudes towards deafness or other disabilities
- working with your child's school/club to ensure that staff and other children have good deaf awareness
- checking your child's statement of special education needs³ or co-ordinated support plan or individual education plan⁴ (if they have one) to see what it says about the development of social and communication skills and, if it's relevant for your child, provision for unstructured times such as break and lunchtime and moving between lessons
- talking to your child about cyberbullying and how to stay safe when using the internet/mobile phones.

If you have a choice, choose a school which shows positive attitudes towards deafness or other disabilities.

In the following sections, we provide some more detail on some of the above steps that you can take to reduce the likelihood of your child being bullied.

³ At the time of writing, Governments in England, Wales and Northern Ireland are proposing a range of changes to the special educational needs (SEN) framework in each nation. This will mean some changes to terminology. For example, in England, statements will become an Education, Health and Care Plan. In Wales, statements may become an Individual Development Plan and in Northern Ireland a co-ordinated support plan. These changes are going to start taking effect from September 2014 in England and from 2015 (tbc) in Wales and Northern Ireland. More information on these changes can be found at www.ndcs.org.uk/sen.

⁴ An IEP is a plan prepared by the school to support your child. It is sometimes called an individual development plan or an individual support plan.

Helping your child to develop emotional resilience and build confidence and self-esteem

Resilience

Resilience is our ability to cope when life is difficult and move on or 'bounce back' from the experience. Being a resilient person is useful in a range of life situations, including experiencing bullying.

Resilience can be developed in your child in a range of ways, including by:

- nurturing a positive self-view
- celebrating achievements of any size
- being positive yourself – having a 'can do' attitude
- using experiences to reflect and learn from. For example, if something didn't go as well as you'd hoped, you could ask your child to think about what you could do differently next time. If something went well, ask your child why that was.
- managed exposure to age-appropriate risk. You can help your child develop independence and confidence by enabling them to learn from experience, for example, by climbing a tree or taking the bus to school alone.
- making sure your child has time to look after themselves (such as eating, sleeping, exercise, relaxing).

Confidence

Being confident and having a positive self-view (high self-esteem) also helps build resilience. If we have the confidence to take action, and believe ourselves to be an able and worthwhile person, we are more able to cope when things are difficult.

Although deaf children are more vulnerable to bullying, helping them to be socially competent, to have the confidence to integrate and take part, and if necessary to defend themselves within their peer group will help reduce the risk. Bullies often pick on those who seem in some way different, weaker or more vulnerable than themselves, so developing an air of confidence (but not aggression), and resilience can help to reduce the risk of bullies targeting your child. Helping them to know how to behave in social situations and knowing how to be a friend to others will also help steer off bullying.

In addition to being confident socially your child will need to be confident about and comfortable with their deafness. If they can explain to people what their technology does, how it helps them and what they need other people to do to help communication they will appear less vulnerable. Never apologising for being deaf will also show other people that they feel comfortable within themselves and do not perceive themselves to be 'weak'.

Bullies often pick on those who seem in some way different, so developing an air of confidence can help to reduce the risk of bullies targeting your child.

A history of over-protection by adults, however well-intentioned and understandable, is one of the factors which may make deaf children more vulnerable to bullying. Many parents of deaf children say that it is important to resist the urge to be over-protective. Deaf children need to develop their independence in the same ways hearing children do.

Here are some suggestions from parents of deaf children for building confidence:

- be completely upfront with your child about his/her deafness right from the outset and encourage them to do the same
- give as much praise as possible for what they're good at
- actively seek environments where they can shine and language is less of a barrier
- recognise and celebrate their successes
- spend quality time together
- let children speak and do things for themselves
- try not to answer questions on their behalf
- don't stop doing things or going places because you're worried how your child or other people will react
- rehearse situations at home so they know what to expect outside, then they can gain more independence more quickly
- discuss strategies for dealing with things before situations arise: for example, "What are you going to do if people stare at you?"
- teach them not to use deafness as an excuse for not doing something
- encourage them to take part in extra-curricular activities.

Rehearse situations at home so they know what to expect outside, then they can gain more independence more quickly.

For more tips see the following NDCS publications, which can be downloaded or ordered from the NDCS Freephone Helpline on 0808 800 8880 or by email at helpline@ndcs.org.uk.

- *Who am I?*
- *What are you Feeling?*
- *Parenting a Deaf Child*



Case study: Sally, mother of Chloe, aged 7

My little girl, Chloe, has microtia. She's always been very open and unselfconscious about it and happily wears her hair behind her ears. She goes to mainstream school and she's doing really well there but she has experienced bullying because of her microtia twice since she started school.

The first time it happened was when she was four. Three children in the class started pointing at her ears and making comments. Luckily Chloe was very quick to tell me what was happening so I was able to do something about it before things got out of hand. I was really angry and upset. I'd kind of expected this sort of thing to happen at some point but it was still upsetting and I did end up crying when I spoke to the teacher about it. I went to see her straight away and she was superb. The next day she did some work with the whole class and Chloe even gave her own little presentation about microtia. Since then she hasn't had any trouble at all with the classmates who've been with her all along. They're all very accepting and it's not an issue. When I asked her recently how the bullying had made her feel, she said that she had felt angry and a little bit sad.

A tip that I'd give to families with deaf children is that it's really important to be upfront from the start about your child's condition and encourage them to do the same.

Supporting children to develop their social and communication skills

Social competence with peers appears to be a key protective factor in making a child less likely to be bullied⁵ and communication is a crucial part of social integration. Social and communication skills can also help to encourage resilience and coping, so anything you (and your child's school) can do to develop them will help to make bullying less likely. It is often the non-teaching parts of the school day such as break and lunchtime – when social skills are even more important – that create difficulties.

The ability to communicate on the same level and about the same things reduces isolation, gives children the confidence to talk about issues and is important for making and maintaining friendships. This starts with teaching young children about turn-taking and co-operative play. Later on, it helps children to fit in if they know about popular topics of the day – TV characters, toys, sports and so on. You can also support your child by making sure they know the slang words and expressions in popular use. These terms change and develop all the time, so try to keep up and keep your child in the know! For more information about communication skills, see the NDCS publication, *Communicating with your Deaf Child*.

Deaf children can lack awareness of how to be a friend. This might be because deaf children, possibly as a result of delayed language development, can find it difficult to understand that others have beliefs, desires, and intentions that are different from their own. Developing this understanding is a key step towards developing the skills to make and maintain friendships. The charity, Kidscape, gives the following ideas from a group of thirteen-year old boys and girls about making friends:

“Be good at giving compliments without going overboard.”
13 year old

- be good at giving compliments without going overboard
- go around with a pleasant expression on your face
- laugh at people's jokes
- be kind
- ask, not demand, to join in
- offer to help others with work or carry things
- invite people to do something
- hang around places where other students are
- be welcoming to new students
- think of something interesting to do
- be willing to share
- be humorous and tell jokes
- be fair
- be good at organising games or activities.

⁵ McLaughlin, C., Byers, R. and Peppin Vaughan, R. (2010) *Responding to Bullying among Children with Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities*.



Different approaches will work better for your individual child. For more tips for children on how to make friends (and how not to make friends), visit www.kidscape.org.uk/young-people/making-friends.

If your child has a statement⁶ or co-ordinated support plan, check what provision, if any, is made for the development of social and communication skills and for support during unstructured times. If you feel that the statement or plan needs to be amended, you can ask for changes at the next annual review, but bear in mind that provision can't be included for a need which hasn't been described, so if you think that your child's social/emotional needs have not been adequately described, or have changed since the statement plan was written, you will need to get this changed too. Any changes will need to be backed up by evidence in a professional's report.

You can also speak to your local Parent Partnership Service for confidential advice about special educational needs. You can find your local service details at www.parentpartnership.org.uk.

⁶ At the time of writing, Governments in England, Wales and Northern Ireland are proposing a range of changes to the special educational needs (SEN) framework in each nation. This will mean some changes to terminology. For example, in England, statements will become an Education, Health and Care Plan. In Wales, statements may become an Individual Development Plan and in Northern Ireland a co-ordinated support plan. These changes are going to start taking effect from September 2014 in England and from 2015 (tbc) in Wales and Northern Ireland. More information on these changes can be found at www.ndcs.org.uk/sen.

Helping your child to stay safe from cyberbullying

Cyberbullying is bullying that takes place using electronic technology such as mobile phones, computers, and tablets. Examples of cyberbullying include unpleasant text messages or emails, rumours spread by email or posted on social networking sites, and embarrassing pictures or videos, or fake profiles.

Cyberbullying is harder to get away from as it can happen at any time of day or night and within the home.

Cyberbullying can be particularly difficult to deal with because:

- it is harder for your child to get away from it as it can happen at any time of day or night and within the home
- it can be done anonymously which can make it difficult and sometimes impossible to trace the source of information posted on the internet
- it can reach a wide audience very quickly
- it is very difficult to delete inappropriate messages once they are posted on the internet.

Here are some suggestions for helping your child to stay safe.

- Talk to your child about cyberbullying and how important it is to take steps to protect against it. Although you can set parental controls, in practice, these don't always work or can be got round, so it's important that children and young people understand **why** they need to take some responsibility for keeping themselves safe.
- Check that your child knows how to do the following (or ask them to tell you how to do it):
 - adjust privacy settings and withhold personal details on social networking sites so that only people they know and trust can access personal information
 - block the sender of any unpleasant texts
 - report online abuse to website administrators.

If cyberbullying arises, try to make sure you or your child keep a copy of any messages or posts that would prove your child is being bullied in this way.

We list where you can go to get more information and advice about cyberbullying in the useful resources section on page 27.

What to look for when choosing a school

There are some features which seem to be common in schools where bullying is dealt with successfully. In its 2012 report, *No Place for Bullying*, Ofsted found that “the schools that had thought the most carefully about helping pupils to interact positively and about preventing bullying had recognised the importance of the physical organisation of the school and the organisation of break times and lunchtimes.”

Based on what Ofsted have identified as important, you could consider asking the following questions:

- How does the school celebrate achievement?
- Does it have an assertive discipline policy? (i.e. does it place more emphasis on rewarding positive behaviour than giving punishments?)
- What training do staff receive with regard to implementing the rules and explaining the school code of conduct to the children?
- How does the school create an atmosphere of harmony and mutual respect?
- How does the school acknowledge and celebrate diversity?
- How does the school expect staff to respond if anyone treats another person in a disrespectful way? (Ofsted identified that schools which deal successfully with bullying are ones where staff are alert to even the smallest indication of anyone treating another person in a disrespectful way, no matter how unintentional, including any behaviour that isolates children from a group. They deal with these situations quickly and keep a record.)
- How does the school deal with issues of prejudice and disrespect in the wider community?
- Do they teach pupils about discrimination and give them opportunities to learn strategies to deal with situations where people may bully or be unpleasant to them or others?
- Does the curriculum address disability and pupils’ understanding of diversity?
- Do they involve visiting speakers and staff who provide positive role models of disability as well as other aspects of diversity?

All schools should have information in their behaviour policies about how they will address bullying in schools. Some may also have developed a separate anti-bullying policy. You can ask to see a copy of these documents.

Question for new schools:

“How does the school create an atmosphere of harmony and mutual respect?”

Case study 2: Rachel, mother of Thomas, aged 12

My son, Thomas, is 12 now. He has bilateral hearing loss which was only diagnosed about a year ago, but the bullying started long before that.

He was first bullied at about the age of seven and looking back, even though we didn't know it at the time, the bullying was related to his deafness. It happened both in school and outside of school, with children taking the mickey out of him for not hearing or for mishearing. They'd do horrible things which played on his deafness, such as whispering behind him or saying something unpleasant and then, when Thomas told the teacher, saying that he must have misheard them.

They knew that it would wind him up and he got into fights. He was struggling educationally and it's surprising that the school didn't spot that there was a problem with his hearing. The bullying made him quite paranoid and sapped his confidence. Even now he feels he doesn't have many friends he can trust and he gets upset.

I found out about it when Thomas told me: we have a good relationship and he was able to open up about it. On some occasions the teacher also told me about it, for example if someone had reported an incident which happened on the way home from school. Obviously it was really upsetting. Before the diagnosis, we thought it was just 'ordinary' bullying, for no apparent reason, but after we got the diagnosis we realised that it was all connected to being unable to hear properly. We spoke to the school, but they didn't do much. They agreed to talk to the bullies, but usually with Thomas present which wasn't very helpful, because he wasn't able to say much, so the teacher ended up believing them. It escalated his paranoia and he was left feeling that he was in the wrong.

He's in secondary school now. We've spoken to the school about his deafness and about deaf awareness: seating him at the front and writing his homework down for him etc. Things have improved a little bit. His tutor does now ring us and they've increased his support, but we're still disappointed by the lack of basic understanding of hearing loss in schools. So much needs to be done about educating teachers about deafness.

I'd advise other parents just not to take no for an answer. You need to be really assertive and don't let people fob you off. I'd also recommend contacting the SENCO (special educational needs co-ordinator) directly instead of waiting for someone to approach you. You need to be proactive in talking to the school about your child's deafness.

Working with your child's school to develop better deaf awareness

A common theme amongst parents who report that their deaf child has been bullied is the lack of deaf awareness in the child's school, so this is clearly an important consideration. However, just because a school has not had any deaf children before, it does not mean that the school cannot become deaf aware.

Here are some suggestions to consider either before your child starts at a school or when they are already there.

- Find out how much the school already understands about deafness by speaking to school staff or your child's Teacher of the Deaf.
- Speak to your child's Teacher of the Deaf about the possibility of providing deaf awareness training for staff if this hasn't already happened. The NDCS Young People's Advisory Board has developed a resource called *Look, Smile, Chat* for schools to use to promote deaf awareness, available at **www.youngpeople.ndcsbuzz.org.uk/looksmilechat**.
- Check whether the school already has a copy of relevant NDCS publications including:
 - *Supporting the Achievement of Deaf Children in Early Years Settings*
 - *Supporting the Achievement of Deaf Children in Primary Schools*
 - *Supporting the Achievement of Deaf Children in Secondary Schools*
 - *Supporting the Achievement of Hearing Impaired Children in Special Schools*
 - *Bullying and Deaf Children: A guide for primary and secondary schools.*
- Speak to your child's Teacher of the Deaf about the possibility of a deaf role model visiting the school. The Teacher of the Deaf should be able to arrange this.
- For younger children, there are storybooks which raise awareness of deafness in an accessible way. You could recommend them to your child's teacher, or lend them a copy if you have one. For example:
 - *Freddie and the Fairy*
 - *A Birthday for Ben*
 - *Oliver gets Hearing Aids*
 - *Elana's Ears*
 - *Moonbird*
 - *Together!*
 - *Just Like us!*

Speak to your child's Teacher of the Deaf about the possibility of a deaf role model visiting the school.

For more storybooks with deaf characters, visit **www.forestbooks.com**.



Some tips from parents of deaf children to prevent bullying

“Try to play-act ways of making friends and develop friend-making language, firstly with dolls.”

“Develop coping strategies. For example, ‘Can you repeat that please, I’m deaf,’ or, if unable to say this, have cards with simple phrases on them.”

“Invite children to tea. Speak to parents about arranging activities during the holidays/birthday parties.”

“School can set up a weekly ‘deaf club’ to help peers understand more about deafness.”

“After-school activities – good for confidence and something to look forward to.”

“Encourage him to explain his deafness and not assume everyone understands.”

If bullying is taking place...

What to do if you are worried that your child might be being bullied

Some parents report that their child came to them straight away when the bullying started, but some children might be reluctant to say anything. If you are worried that your child is being bullied but hasn't told you about it, Bullying UK suggests asking the following types of questions:

- What did you do at school today?
- Who did you play with?
- What did you play?
- Did you enjoy it?
- Would you have liked to play with someone else or play different games?
- What did you do at lunchtime?
- Is there anyone you don't like at school? Why?
- Are you looking forward to going to school tomorrow?

If your child has difficulties explaining what is happening, Contact a Family⁷ suggests that, depending on the age of your child, you could:

- draw pictures of your child's day, or ask them to draw what has happened during their day. For example, you could draw pictures of them at break, at lunchtime, in the classroom, moving about the school, draw what games they played.
- use toys, puppets or pets to encourage your child to talk. You could use them to tell a story of a child being bullied and show how important it is to tell someone. Your child may feel more comfortable telling a toy or puppet what is happening.
- use a diary system or a box where you and your child write comments and questions you can talk about later.
- use scales to rate how your child is feeling at different times during the day. For example, you could use numbers or traffic light symbols, where the different numbers or colours mean different feelings. If you use a traffic light system, use green for feeling good, orange for okay and red for upset.
- use pictures of faces showing different expressions to explain feelings. You could draw pictures of happy, sad, angry, crying faces and ask your child to choose one to match how they feel.
- use visual prompts like pictures in books, communication boards (visual symbols organised by topic) and cue cards (that contain a message in a picture or written format).

Using a diary system or a box where you and your child write comments and questions you can talk about later might help you communicate about bullying.

⁷ Contact a Family (October 2013) *A guide to dealing with bullying: for parents of disabled children.*



What to do if your child is being bullied

Parents report that they felt a range of emotions from sadness and helplessness to extreme anger when they found out that their child was being bullied. It's natural to feel like this but remember that there are things you can do.

Work with your child

- Listen to your child. Give them time and your undivided attention so that they can explain to you to the best of their ability what has happened.
- Don't get angry when they talk to you about it.
- Reassure your child that it's not their fault: children who are bullied sometimes feel that they are to blame.
- Ask your child what they would like to happen next.
- There are resources specifically aimed at children and young people about bullying which your child might find helpful. For example, the following websites have information on bullying:

→ www.ndcsbuzz.org.uk

→ www.bullying.co.uk

→ www.childline.org.uk and/or
www.childline.org.uk/deafzone

→ www.beatbullying.org.uk.

Work with the school

- If the bullying happened in school, arrange to speak to your child's class teacher or form tutor or head of year. Even if the bullying took place outside school premises, state schools can discipline pupils for misbehaving. This can relate to any bullying incidents occurring anywhere off the school premises.⁸
- Your child's Teacher of the Deaf is an important source of information and support, so speak to them about the bullying.
- Ask to see the school's policy on bullying. All schools should have one (see the section, what the law says about bullying on page 23).
- Explain to the school the effect that the bullying is having on your child (and possibly on you and siblings). See your GP if your child is unable to go to school because of the stress caused by the bullying.
- Talk to the school about your child's deafness, or other relevant difficulty or disability. Encourage the school to be more deaf aware if necessary (see the section, working with your child's school to develop better deaf awareness on page 17). Your child's Teacher of the Deaf can help with this.
- Keep a record of any instances of bullying and your dealings with the school about the bullying. Contact a Family have produced a bullying diary for parents in *A Guide to Dealing with Bullying: For parents of disabled children*.
- Try to work with the school to find a solution. It may take more than one meeting. Be persistent. Some parents report that it takes several incidents before their child is taken seriously. If speaking to the class teacher (or other member of staff you first spoke to) doesn't work, contact the head teacher. NDCS has also produced guidance for schools on bullying which you can provide your school with a copy of.
- If you're not satisfied with the school's response, or if the bullying continues, you may want to write a formal letter of complaint and then escalate as needed. It's a good idea to check the school's complaints procedure before you write. Most schools have it on their website. Otherwise, just ask them for a copy. Keep a copy of the letter of complaint. Contact a Family have produced a sample letter you can send to your school if your child is being bullied in *A Guide to Dealing with Bullying: For parents of disabled children*.

Get help from your local authority

Unlike the rest of the UK, in Scotland bullying can be considered as an additional support need. A national programme called Getting it right for every child (GIRFEC) aims to improve outcomes for all children and young people. For more information, see *The Parents' Guide to Additional Support for Learning*, www.enquire.org.uk/publications/parents-guide.

⁸ Department for Education (July 2013) (England) *Preventing and Tackling Bullying: Advice for headteachers, staff and governing bodies*.

In England, Wales and Northern Ireland, bullying in itself is not considered to be a special educational need. However, if it is part of a wider picture of social and emotional difficulties (for example, an inability to make friends), it should be covered by special educational provision and you could discuss any concerns you have with the school / pre-school or consider asking for a statutory assessment.

Contact social care services

Social care services would not normally be involved in any cases involving bullying unless they believed that the bullying poses a significant risk to your child. However, parents have a legal right to request a 'child in need' assessment if they would like additional support from social care services to address any needs arising from bullying, as well as any wider needs.

For more information, NDCS has produced a factsheet *Deaf Children and Social Care – Your rights* which can be downloaded from the NDCS website at www.ndcs.org.uk or ordered from the NDCS Freephone Helpline.

Contact NDCS

NDCS can provide information and support for parents in relation to bullying and any related issues. For more information call the NDCS Freephone Helpline on **0808 800 8880** or email helpline@ndcs.org.uk.

Tips from parents on responding to bullying

- “Ask for the anti-bullying policy.”
- “Keep a log of what happens.”
- “Ask your daughter to write/draw a log of what happens. It will also help her to express her feelings.”
- “Ask the Teacher of the Deaf to do deaf awareness training focusing on social development.”
- “I’d advise other parents to check with the school about how they propose to handle any bullying and make sure you’re comfortable with it.”

What the law says about bullying

Every school must have measures in place to deal with all forms of bullying. You can ask to see their anti-bullying policy for more information.

Bullying in itself is not a specific criminal offence in the UK, but some types of bullying are illegal. This includes bullying that involves:

- violence or assault
- theft
- harassment and intimidation
- threatening behaviour
- sending abusive emails or text messages
- hate crime.

Under the Malicious Communications Act 1988, it is an offence for a person to send an electronic communication to another person with the intent to cause distress or anxiety or which conveys a message which is indecent or grossly offensive, a threat, or information which is false and known or believed to be false by the sender. For more information about the law relating to electronic communications, visit www.knowthenet.org.uk.

Should I involve the police?

Here is what the Metropolitan Police say about involving the police in relation to bullying.

Can the police come into school or college and arrest bullies?

In practice, this doesn't usually happen. That's because most schools have got measures in place to tackle bullying early and, by working together, pupils, teachers and parents are in a much better position than the police to prevent it.

But what if the bullying is serious, perhaps involving physical assault?

In some circumstances, the police do get called in, usually by the school. It's generally a last resort or because something very serious has happened.

If a young person is continually getting involved in bullying behaviour including violence, theft or harassment, it may lead to them being given an Anti Social Behaviour Order (ASBO).

Anyone – a teacher, parent or pupil – can make a complaint about bullying to the police if they feel it's serious. But, in most cases, we recommend you try talking to your teachers or another responsible adult first.

The Equality Act 2010⁹ in England, Scotland and Wales makes it illegal to discriminate against, harass or victimise a person because of their disability. The Public Sector Equality Duty, which came into force in April 2011, requires public bodies (local authorities, maintained schools, free schools and academies) to have due regard to the need to:

- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited under the Equality Act
- advance equality of opportunity between disabled people and non-disabled people
- foster good relations between disabled and non-disabled people.

This means that consideration of equality issues must influence local authorities¹⁰ and schools when they make decisions about how they act as a responsible body, how they develop, evaluate and review policy and how they design, deliver and evaluate services.

For more detailed information on the Equality Act, see the NDCS factsheet *The Equality Act and your Deaf Child's Education*.

What to do if your child is bullying others

Some behaviour exhibited by deaf children might be misunderstood by others, for example, speaking too loudly, using aggression to get attention (because they haven't yet got the skills to do it any other way), tugging at someone's sleeve, tapping someone or banging the table to get attention. This shows the importance of deaf awareness in schools, so that hearing children understand why a deaf child might behave in a certain way. If you think this might be happening, speak to your child about their behaviour and how it might be interpreted by others.

Make sure that your child understands about right and wrong behaviour and bear in mind that just because a child is deaf it doesn't mean that they won't be a bully. Even if behaviour is unintentional, they need to learn what is acceptable to prevent problems in the future.

Talk to your child's school about deaf awareness. The same applies if your child's 'bullying' behaviour arises from a difficulty or disability other than deafness: make sure that the school is aware of your child's condition and how it affects their behaviour.

Sometimes children who are being bullied respond by bullying others. This can in turn lead to further bullying. If your child is accused of bullying, it's important to take it seriously, even if you find it hard to believe that they could do such a thing. Find out more about what happened and work with the school (or club or other place where the bullying is said to have taken place) to find a solution.

⁹ The Equality Act does not apply in Northern Ireland. The relevant legislation in Northern Ireland is Disability Discrimination (Northern Ireland) Order 2006 and The Special Educational Needs and Disability (Northern Ireland) Order 2005.

¹⁰ Known as education authorities in Scotland and education and library boards in Northern Ireland.



Photo posed by models

Bullying of siblings in relation to their deaf brother or sister

Some parents have reported that it is not only their deaf child who is bullied because of their disability - sometimes siblings are bullied too. The suggestions for recognising and responding to bullying of deaf children in this publication will also apply to their siblings, for example, improving deaf awareness at the school, reassuring the bullied sibling that it's not their (or their sibling's) fault, building their confidence and self-esteem. You could also look into the possibility of getting support for siblings, which is not specifically about bullying but does talk generally about having a disabled sibling. NDCS has a publication, *Me and My Deaf Brother and Sister*, which was written for hearing siblings by hearing siblings of deaf children. Other charities such as Contact a Family and Sibs also offer information and support for siblings.

Case study: Kelly, mother of Martin, aged 10

The bullying started at school when Martin got hearing aids at the age of four. The main thing was that the other children looked at him differently once he got his hearing aids. To begin with they were naturally curious. One day some of them were found looking through his hearing aid equipment at lunchtime – they'd sneaked back into the classroom to look at it. Martin's Teacher of the Deaf advised the school to show the class and talk about it, but they didn't.

There were some boys in his class he'd never got on with and I think that his deafness was something that made him stand out and that they could pick on. One day a couple of boys got hold of Martin and one pinned him down on the floor while the other ripped his hearing aids out. Unfortunately the teachers didn't see it and the bullying went on for two years until the teachers eventually followed the boys outside and saw them hit him in the stomach.

He was badly affected by the bullying. He told us about it and kept coming home crying. He became very depressed. The mental bullying was in some ways worse than the physical. He was already having to get used to wearing hearing aids as well as being behind at school (he's caught up now) and being bullied on top of all that was a lot for him to deal with. Even now he's very quick to be on the defensive. If he hasn't caught what you're saying, he assumes it's something nasty.

Part of the problem was that, although he usually speaks very well, when he gets agitated he finds it hard to communicate. He'd get told off – which he finds very upsetting – then wouldn't be able to explain because he was in a state. The teacher would think that he was in the wrong, because she hadn't allowed him to calm down and take his time explaining what had happened.

I was very upset when he told us about the bullying and got in touch with the school and the school nurse. The school nurse told Martin that when he was bullied he should say things such as "Stop doing that. I don't like it," as if he hadn't already tried that! The Teacher of the Deaf offered to do some deaf awareness training, but the school has never taken her up on the offer.

The worst time was last year, when the bullying spread to football club. It was the same boys who were bullying him in school. They were calling him names such as "retard" and "deaf-o boy" and pinching his clothes in the changing rooms. It got so bad that he had to stop going to football and he started saying that he didn't want to go to school, even though he is doing very well academically. This time, the teacher spoke to the whole team and although the bullying hasn't stopped completely, things are much better now than they have been in a long time. I'd advise other parents in our position to keep on at the school. You know your child and you know when something isn't right.

Useful resources

Anti-Bullying Alliance briefing paper (March 2011)

Bullying of Children with Disabilities and Special Educational Needs in Schools: Briefing paper for parents on the views and experiences of other parents, carers and families

www.anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk

Contact a Family (October 2013)

A Guide to Dealing with Bullying for Parents of Disabled Children: Information for families http://www.cafamily.org.uk/media/721109/caf_bullying_guide_9_may_2014_web.pdf

Ofsted report (June 2012)

No Place for Bullying

www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/no-place-for-bullying

Department for Education guidance to schools (March 2014)

Preventing and Tackling Bullying: Advice for headteachers, staff and governing bodies

www.gov.uk/government/publications/preventing-and-tackling-bullying

Scottish Government (2010)

A National Approach to Anti-bullying for Scotland's Children and Young People

www.scotland.gov.uk

Welsh Assembly (2012)

Respecting Others: Anti-bullying guidance circular 23/03

www.wales.gov.uk

Department for Education (Northern Ireland) (2001)

Pastoral Care in Schools: Promoting positive behaviour

www.deni.gov.uk

Resources on cyberbullying:

- www.saferinternet.org.uk has e-safety tips, advice and resources to help children and young people stay safe on the internet, including a parents' guide to technology.
- www.beatbullying.org.uk has lots of information for children and young people, parents and professionals about cyberbullying and online safety (as well as other aspects of bullying).
- www.youngpeople.ndcsbuzz.org.uk/infoadvice has information for children and young people about cyberbullying.
- www.childline.org.uk/deafzone - Childline Deafzone has advice for young people, including videos in BSL with subtitles.
- www.ceop.police.uk gives information and advice about internet safety for parents, children and young people.
- www.kidsmart.org.uk includes a parents' guide to technology.
- www.knowthenet.org.uk provides information about safe use of mobiles and the internet.

NDCS publications

- *Supporting the Achievement of Deaf Children in Early Years*
- *Supporting the Achievement of Deaf Children in Primary Schools*
- *Supporting the Achievement of Deaf Children in Secondary Schools*
- *Supporting the Achievement of Deaf Children in Special Schools*
- *Communicating with your Deaf Child*
- *Parenting a Deaf Child*
- *Bullying and Deaf Children: A guide for primary and secondary schools*
- *Factsheet: The Equality Act and your Deaf Child's Education*
- *Here to Learn: A resource for schools (DVD)*

Useful organisations

Anti-Bullying Alliance

A coalition of organisations and individuals working together to stop bullying and create safe environments in which children and young people can live, grow, play and learn. They provide advice and expertise in relation to all forms of bullying between children and young people.

www.anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk

Anti-Bullying Network (Scotland)

Scottish organisation providing anti-bullying support to school communities on the internet, with a parents' and young people's section.

www.antibullying.net

Beatbullying

Information and practical advice on dealing with bullying for children, young people, parents and professionals.

www.beatbullying.org.uk

Bullies Out (Wales)

Information for children, young people and adults in Wales.

www.bulliesout.com

Bullying UK

Provides advice on bullying. Part of the Family Lives charity.

www.bullying.co.uk

CEOP (Child Exploitation and Online Protection)

Information and advice about internet safety for parents, children and young people.

www.ceop.police.uk

Childline

Helpline for children offering emotional support and counselling on any issue, including bullying. Helpline: 0800 1111 (24 hours). Can also contact by email or online chat.

www.childline.org.uk

Childline Deafzone

www.childline.org.uk/deafzone

Contact a Family

National charity for families with disabled children. Offers support, information and advice on topics including bullying.

Helpline: 0808 808 3555

www.cafamily.org.uk

Digizen

Provides information for professionals, parents and young people on issues such as social networking and cyberbullying.

www.digizen.org

Education Support for Northern Ireland

Information for parents, students and teachers about bullying and other issues.

www.education-support.org.uk

Equality Commission for Northern Ireland

Information and guidance on discrimination and human rights issues, including disability discrimination.

www.equalityni.org

Kidscape

UK charity established specifically to prevent bullying and child sexual abuse.

Anti-Bullying Helpline for Parents: 08451 205 204

www.kidscape.org.uk

Knowthenet

Information about safe use of mobiles and the internet.

www.knowthenet.org.uk

Northern Ireland Anti-Bullying Forum (NIABF)

A coalition of organisations working together to end bullying of children and young people.

www.niabf.org.uk

NSPCC (England, Scotland and Northern Ireland)

Provides information, advice and counselling to anyone concerned about a child's safety.

Helpline: 0808 800 5000

Text: 88858

help@nspcc.org.uk

www.nspcc.org.uk/reportconcern

Parent Partnership Services

Parent Partnership Services (PPS) offer advice and support to parents and carers of children and young people with special educational needs. They are free, impartial and confidential services available in every local authority.

www.parentpartnership.org.uk

Respect Me (Scotland)

Scotland's anti-bullying service.

Helpline: 0844 800 8600

www.respectme.org.uk

Sibs

Charity representing the needs of siblings of disabled people.

www.sibs.org.uk/parents

Thinkuknow

Latest information on websites, mobiles and new technology. Website created for young people by the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP).

www.thinkuknow.co.uk

UK Safer Internet Centre

For e-safety tips, advice and resources to help children and young people stay safe on the internet.

www.saferinternet.org.uk

Joining NDCS is easy, free and you get lots of free info
Go to www.ndcs.org.uk or contact our Freephone Helpline
There are loads of ways we can support you – and the

“Through the NDCS publications and website we’ve had so much help coming to terms with her deafness and making sure that it isn’t a barrier to her life.”

We have more than a hundred free publications for you at www.ndcs.org.uk/info.

They cover everything from hearing aids and cochlear implants to advice on how to support your child in school and at home.



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lpline **0808 800 8880**

ey're all free!

“A whole new world opened up – meeting other families meant I didn’t feel alone.”

Our free events are a fantastic way of meeting other families with deaf children. You can also get tips from professionals, share your experiences and learn from the inspiring stories of deaf adults.

And, as your child gets older, there are fun activities to boost their confidence and help them make new friends.

Find events in your area at www.ndcs.org.uk/events.



Questions?
Phone us
0808 800 8880



“It is so nice to have people willing to listen and help.”

We’re here for you when you need help and support.

Our Freephone Helpline is open:
Monday to Thursday
9.30am–9.30pm

Friday
9.30am–5pm

You can get in touch with us on **0808 800 8880**, at www.ndcs.org.uk/live or helpline@ndcs.org.uk.

There’s lots we can do for you – visit www.ndcs.org.uk to find out more.

NDCS is the leading charity dedicated to creating a world without barriers for deaf children and young people.

**NDCS Freephone Helpline:
0808 800 8880 (voice and text)**

helpline@ndcs.org.uk

www.ndcs.org.uk

Published by the National Deaf Children's Society © NDCS June 2014
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Tel: 020 7490 8656 (voice and text) Fax: 020 7251 5020
NDCS is a registered charity in England and Wales no. 1016532 and
in Scotland no. SC040779. ISBN 978-1-909706-07-1
This publication can be requested in large print, in Braille and on audio CD.