



# ADHD and Bullying

Providing help for families

**ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder) is a medical condition, thought to affect around 5% of school-age children,<sup>1</sup> making it one of the most common developmental disorders in children. It has three main features: inattention, hyperactivity and impulsiveness.**

## What is bullying?

Bullying is a behaviour by an individual or group, usually repeated over time, that intentionally hurts another individual or group, either physically or emotionally.<sup>2</sup>

## How common is bullying?

Bullying is a common problem experienced by many children and young people. According to a National Bullying Survey (2020) 51% of young people reported either being bullied, or witnessing bullying within the previous year.<sup>3</sup>

## ADHD and bullying

According to a large Swedish Study ADHD was found to be associated with bullying other students (more than 3 times as likely) and being bullied often (more than 10 times as likely).<sup>4</sup> Another ADHD study showed that compared with boys, girls are more often the victims of bullying and are less likely to be the bully.<sup>5</sup>

## Types of bullying

Bullying is a form of aggression that can be direct or indirect, involving both boys and girls.

- **Physical bullying:** pushing, kicking, pinching, hitting, biting, shoving, stealing belongings, threatening with weapons (more common in boys).
- **Verbal bullying:** name calling, mocking, threatening, gossiping, picking on the victim etc.
- **Social bullying:** occurs indirectly by ignoring, spreading rumours, social rejection, excluding from peer group (more common in girls).
- **Cyber bullying:** it is estimated that up to 30% of young people (1 in 3) are cyber bullied at some stage.<sup>6</sup> It can occur continually both inside and outside school and may involve internet and mobile phone use in order to threaten, tease or abuse the victim. This may include sending offensive emails, text messages, circulating indecent images and misusing social networks such as Facebook®.

## Why are children bullied?

The reasons for bullying may lie deep within the mind of the bully, who themselves tend to have a number of social and emotional issues. A bully may seek out a person who seems vulnerable, non-aggressive, physically or socially weaker or lower in confidence or self-esteem.

A bully will then find an area on which to focus the bullying such as:

- The child's weight, appearance, colour of the skin/hair, culture or religion.
- The child's disability, how they walk or talk or even for having an unusual name.

Bullying occurs mostly at school, during playtime or lunchtime when there is minimal supervision.

## Children with ADHD

Children with ADHD or oppositional and aggressive behaviour tend to lash out and fight back when bullied. They tend to have difficulties with socialising and understanding social cues.

Some children who are bullied are vulnerable, with a range of pre-existing conditions such as a learning disability or Autism Spectrum Disorder.





## Impact of bullying

### Effects of bullying

**Bullying** can have serious and harmful effects. Having been bullied, some children can become bullies themselves (both a bully and a victim in a bullying cycle).

**Bullies** are more likely to be involved with problem behaviours such as drinking and smoking and to show poorer school achievement than other children. It is reported that, as young adults, bullies are more likely to have criminal convictions and traffic violations than their less-aggressive peers.<sup>7</sup>

**The victim** often has low self-esteem and feels miserable, anxious or sad. He or she may also feel insecure, fearful, helpless or guilty. They may avoid school, lack concentration, perform poorly in school work and become lonely. Persistent bullying can also lead to self-harm and depression.<sup>7</sup>

### How to identify bullying

Children who are being bullied may show a number of symptoms such as:

- Refusing to go to school, poor concentration, poor school grades.
- Headaches, tummy aches, bed wetting, sleep difficulties, anxiety and even self-harm.

### How to deal with bullying

- Take your child's concerns seriously and do not blame your child or ignore the problem. It is important to discuss the issues with your child openly and honestly.
- Reassure your child that the situation is not hopeless and help is available.
- Ask your child questions related to bullying including how long it has been going on and whether the school teacher is aware of the problem.



**WALK:** Ignore the bully's hurtful remarks



**TALK:** Make confident and non-provocative statements to the bully



**SQUAWK:** Report to an adult

- Teach your child to be assertive but not to over-react or lash out at the bully.
- Cyber bullying: For safe internet use always ensure there is adequate parental supervision. Encourage your child to avoid replying to nasty messages, not to post photos or videos they are not happy for others to watch and to avoid adult websites.
- Contact the head teacher of your child's school to raise concerns and discuss how best to resolve the problem.
- You can also contact **Family Lives helpline (0808 800 2222)** for advice.

### What to do if your child is a bully

- Explain it is not fun, it can cause sadness and even lead the victim to attempt self-harm.
- Help and support your child to resolve their own social and emotional problems.

### School support

- Bullying is unacceptable and every school should have an anti-bullying policy in place.
- Some of the methods of dealing with bullying include: no-blame, counselling, circle time and peer support programmes.

### Books and Websites

- Bullyproof Your Child For Life: Protect Your Child from Teasing, Taunting, and Bullying for Good, by Joel Haber, Penguin Group Publishers.
- Bullies, Bigmouths and So-Called Friends (for children), by Jenny Alexander, Hodder Children's Books.
- **www.childline.org.uk**  
The charity provides anti-bullying information, resources, advice and support for young people.
- **www.bullying.co.uk**
- **www.familylives.org.uk**



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### Acknowledgements:

Dr C R Yemula, Consultant Community Paediatrician, Bedford.

Dr U Chowdhury, Consultant Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist, Dunstable.

Liz Bonar, Daubeney Middle School, Kempston.

Paul Clair, SEED, Robert Bruce Middle School, Kempston.

Supported by an unrestricted educational grant from Flynn Pharma Ltd.



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UK/MXL/2021/1371 May 2021