Cleft.NET.East

Guidance and support when children are teased and/or bullied

Who is the leaflet for? What is its aim?

This leaflet was written to provide parents with guidance on how to support children when they suspect teasing and/or bullying.

Worries about bullying are a major concern for many parents and some children. Having a cleft does not automatically mean that your child will be bullied. In fact, most young people with a cleft have plenty of friends, enjoy their time at school and cope well when approached about their cleft.

Bullying can affect any of us and this leaflet hopes to provide guidance on how to cope with this.

Types of teasing and bullying

Teasing is part of most children’s normal experience. However, this can get out of hand and no longer be ‘a bit of fun’. If the teasing is happening frequently or persistently and your child is starting to feel hurt and/or upset, then it needs to be addressed.

There are many different types of bullying:

- **Verbal**: name-calling, laughing, being nasty, talking behind your back.
- **Non-verbal**: pointing, social exclusion, hiding/breaking/stealing your child’s things.
- **Physical**: hitting, biting, kicking, pushing, hair-pulling.
- **Indirect/relational aggression**: where a third person or persons are used to harm the victim (such as shunning, spreading rumours).
- **Cyber**: posting nasty messages/pictures/videos online or on social media, sending abusive texts, making threatening telephone calls.

When to suspect bullying

Your child may not tell you that he or she is being bullied. It can be useful for parents to be aware of signs that their child is being bullied.
Indicators that children are being bullied include the following:

- Changes in their normal behaviour – for example, children may be more upset, become angry or be less talkative than usual.
- Suddenly stop enjoying activities, going to places, and/or stop wanting to go to after school clubs, lessons etc.
- They may start using language that is not typical for them.
- Frequently complaining of headaches or stomach aches.
- Changes in their eating or sleeping habits.
- Broken or missing possessions.

What you can do to support your child

Reassurance

It can be difficult for children to tell their parents or teachers that they are being bullied for fear that the bullies will find out and make the situation even worse. If your child does raise problems:

- Praise your child for telling you and reassure them that you will help to sort out the problem and they were right to tell you.
- It is important to let your child know that he/she is not to blame for the teasing/bullying.
- Stay calm so that your child realises that you are not going to make the situation worse for them.
- Do not promise to keep it a secret, but discuss and agree with your child a plan of action.
- Help your child to re-build confidence and feel valued and important.

Being open with your child

Help your child to recognise, name, accept and express how he or she may be feeling. For example, “it can make me feel sad when people call me names”. Listen to your child and gently encourage him/her to talk about what is worrying him/her.

Making new friends

Lots of young people go through difficult phases with friendships. Having different groups of friends (for example: home, school, music, sports clubs etc.) can be very helpful. This is because if your child is going through a tricky patch with one set of friends, they have others to remind them that they are still able to have good friendships.

School policy

It is important to alert the school. The law states that all schools must have an anti-bullying policy. If your child is being bullied at school it can help to develop a good working relationship with the teachers.
Does your child have someone at school they like and trust whom he/she can speak to? If not, a good starting place is to make an appointment with his/her Form Tutor or Head of Year. Teachers often have practical ideas about how to manage the bullies, without revealing their source of information.

If you believe the school is being unsupportive, or is not doing enough to stop the bullying, then speak to a governor and explain your concerns.

**Staying safe on-line**
For advice and support on keeping your child safe online: [https://www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/keeping-children-safe/online-safety/talking-your-child-staying-safe-online/](https://www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/keeping-children-safe/online-safety/talking-your-child-staying-safe-online/)

**How you may feel as a parent**
Being the parent of a child who is being bullied can bring up strong feelings of anger, injustice and helplessness. You may need support from your family and friends to cope with your own reactions and make sure you can help your child manage.

**Further information**
There are a number of websites to help parents and children manage with bullying. A number of these are listed below:

- CLAPA: [www.clapa.com](http://www.clapa.com)
- Kidscape: [www.kidscape.org.uk](http://www.kidscape.org.uk)
- Childline: [www.childline.org.uk](http://www.childline.org.uk)
- Changing Faces: [www.changingfaces.co.uk](http://www.changingfaces.co.uk)
- Bullying UK: [http://www.bullying.co.uk/](http://www.bullying.co.uk/)

**How to contact us**
If you have any questions or would like to discuss your concerns further, then please contact the cleft psychology team on 01223 596272. Alternatively, please let any of the cleft team know, who will be able to contact the psychology department for you.
We are now a smoke-free site: smoking will not be allowed anywhere on the hospital site. For advice and support in quitting, contact your GP or the free NHS stop smoking helpline on 0800 169 0 169.

Other formats:

If you would like this information in another language, large print or audio, please ask the department where you are being treated, to contact the patient information team: patient.information@addenbrookes.nhs.uk.

Please note: We do not currently hold many leaflets in other languages; written translation requests are funded and agreed by the department who has authored the leaflet.

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Authors Cleft.NET.East
Pharmacist N/A
Department Cambridge University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, Hills Road, Cambridge, CB2 0QQ www.cuh.org.uk
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