

WHY DO PEOPLE

BULLY?

It can be distressing to learn that your child/ward is exhibiting bullying behaviour. There are many reasons why a young person may display bullying behaviour and there is often no 'one right answer'. It's important to listen to your child/ward in order to understand why they may be displaying this behaviour.

Below, we've compiled a list of the most common reasons why a child displays bullying behaviour:

MEDIA INFLUENCES

Young people can be heavily influenced by the media they consume: YouTube, TikTok, Instagram... all these platforms and more can play a large part in how a young person behaves on and offline. Many young people want to 'fit in' to 'youth culture' and are afraid of being seen to be 'different'. They might have seen popular dance trends on TikTok or the must-have game on TV. All of these influences suggest behaviours to young people on how to obtain status within their community. This isn't to say that the online world is all bad – it can offer young people opportunities to find their 'tribe' and meet new friends but it's important to consider what media your child/ward is consuming and how it could influence their behaviour.

Our Top Tip:

The best way to understand online platforms and trends is to explore it first-hand; why not download TikTok and see what all the hype is about? Or you could even ask your child/ward to show you the app and discuss the pros/cons. Whatever you do, remember that online platforms are not inherently 'good' or 'bad' – it all depends on how they're used.

SOCIAL INFLUENCE/STATUS

Tied into the above, displaying bullying behaviour can often be seen as a quick way to elevate status within their peer group. They may emulate behaviour seen by others in the classroom which provoke a positive response from their peers. This often manifests itself in disruptive behaviour but it's important to note that sometimes, this behaviour can also stem from a lack of social skills or awareness. Does your child/ward perhaps have difficulties making friends or keeping friendship groups? Similarly, sometimes this behaviour can be used as 'shield' to hide their shortcomings – 'If I act like a tough person who bullies others, no one will know that I have low confidence', for example.

Our Top Tip:

Speak with your child/ward on an individual basis, away from distractions and when you are both feeling calm – an argument is rarely a good time to try to get to the bottom of their behaviour! You could instead approach the conversation over dinner or in the car – ask them how they are feeling and what they think could be the reason for their behaviour. Their answer might surprise you. You could ask them why they covet status and if bullying behaviour is the best way to achieve it – instead, what unique skills or talents do they have that make them unique? They may just need help to discover – and celebrate – what these are and build their self-confidence without the need to hide behind their behaviour.

DON'T WANT TO BE TARGETED THEMSELVES

By displaying bullying behaviour themselves, some young people believe this will protect them from experiencing it.

Our Top Tip:

This is often tied into social status mentioned above. It's therefore important to foster a supportive home environment in which your child/ward can speak to you about their feelings.

LACK OF SELF-CONFIDENCE

It's important to remember that a young person who displays bullying behaviour may be doing so in order to compensate for a lack of self-confidence or similar insecurity.

Our Top Tip:

Provide opportunities for your child/ward to feel empowered. This is not to be confused with rewarding or ignoring the bullying behaviour – this should always be addressed directly so that they understand the behaviour is not tolerated. However, it's also important to build their confidence and skills and thereby reduce their need to compensate for a lack of self-confidence. Celebrate their successes – however small – and show them that their positive contributions are valued. You could also speak with their school teachers to see if they may offer a mentoring programme or other support provision to develop their confidence; this way, you can work with the school to provide these opportunities both at home and at school.

EXTERNAL PRESSURES

Various external pressures can contribute towards your child/ward displaying bullying behaviour – for example, academic pressures or perceived academic 'failures', exam stress, high-expectations at home, caring responsibilities, etc. All of these can pile on top of one another and cause a young person to act out by displaying bullying behaviour.

Our Top Tip:

Does your child/ward have an opportunity to regularly 'offload' i.e. share their day and stresses with you? Is there a school counsellor/nurse who can support your child/ward's mental – as well as physical – health? Does your child/ward have a teacher they trust at school who they could speak to if they feel stressed?

BLAMING THE TARGET

Some young people try to justify bullying behaviour by claiming that the person experiencing it was 'asking to be bullied'. For example, you may have heard them say 'if they just lost some weight/had a normal hair colour/didn't dress like a goth, no one would bully them'. It's important to remind your child/ward that everyone deserves to be respected and ask them how they would feel if someone bullied them? By placing themselves in another person's shoes, they will practice empathy and may reconsider their words/actions.

Our Top Tip:

Discuss with your child/ward the need to respect and celebrate what makes us different and remind them that no one should feel scared to go to school.

HOME/FAMILY DIFFICULTIES

A negative and/or dysfunctional home life can sometimes result in a young person displaying bullying behaviour in school as a coping mechanism. Negative behaviour, like violence, that the young person has seen at home may be mirrored when with their peers.

Our Top Tip:

It can be difficult to acknowledge our own shortcomings and negative behaviour but by doing so, you can begin to change your own behaviour and theirs too. Has anything changed recently at home that may have upset or otherwise affected your child/ward? This may explain sudden changes in mood or behaviour – particularly aggression. If things haven't changed recently, it's still important to speak with your child/ward on a one-on-one basis in a safe, supportive environment, in order to understand if this is affecting them more than they may say.

A CULTURE OF BULLYING BEHAVIOUR

When bullying behaviour is seen to be the norm, young people may not question it and instead actively take part. One example we see in a lot of the schools we work with is normalised homophobic language – 'that's so gay'. It's important to challenge your child/ward if they take part in this behaviour – ask them if they understand what they are saying and the harm it can cause others. Often, young people may not be aware of the potential impact of their words or actions and, by making them aware of this, you can provide them with the opportunity to change their behaviour. A good example of this in practice is to ask how they would feel if, instead of 'that's so gay', everyone said 'that's so [your child/ward's name]'. Odds are, they would feel upset and want others to stop.

Our Top Tip:

It can feel overwhelming to try to tackle a culture of bullying behaviour alone – and that's why we work with schools through our [free Anti-Bullying Ambassador Programme](#).

REPLICATING BEHAVIOUR

Some young people may replicate behaviour they have seen or experienced from others. They may have parents/carers or siblings who display bullying behaviour as the norm at home and believe that they too must behave in a similar way. Some young people may not think there is anything 'wrong' with their behaviour at all as a result.

Our Top Tip:

The first step towards addressing this behaviour is often to explain what bullying behaviour is – young people may struggle to identify bullying behaviour without a clear definition. The Diana Award defines bullying behaviour as 'repeated, negative behaviour that is intended to make others feel upset, uncomfortable or unsafe'. Once your child/ward understand this, it is then their choice whether to change their behaviour or continue to display bullying behaviour.

Remember that there is no one-size-fits-all to explain why a young person displays bullying behaviour and it can often be a result of a combination of factors. Whatever the reason, young people should be given an opportunity to acknowledge, address and change their behaviour. It's important not to label young people as 'bullies'. Instead, at The Diana Award, we focus on 'bullying behaviour' because behaviour is something that can be stopped or changed. Young people who are displaying bullying behaviour may need support to see the impact of their behaviour or support with managing their own feelings. As a parent/carer, you are well placed to help them make this behaviour change.

FURTHER SUPPORT_

For further support, check out our Support Centre and free Anti-Bullying Ambassador Programme at <https://diana-award.org.uk/anti-bullying-training>

We're proud to be the only charity set up in memory of Diana, Princess of Wales, and her belief that young people have the power to change the world. It's a big mission but there are two things within it that we focus our charity's efforts on – young people and change.

Throughout all of our programmes and initiatives, 'change' for and by young people is central, including our anti-bullying work which encourages change in attitudes and behaviours.

We hope you found this resource useful and wish you all the best in your anti-bullying journey. If you would like to help us create more resources and train even more Anti-Bullying Ambassadors, you can make a £5 donation by texting CHANGE 5 to 70470 or visit diana-award.org.uk/donate

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