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Anti-Bullying:

**A guide for mothers,
fathers and carers**

of pupils in Islington schools

Who is this guide for?

This guide is to help parents and carers of children affected by bullying in an Islington school. The booklet gives advice on what bullying is, how to recognise whether your child may be being bullied and what to do about it, in partnership with the school.

In most cases, any problem with bullying will be resolved quickly by your child's school, in partnership with you. However, if you are not satisfied with the response, this booklet will also tell you what your options are, give you practical advice and tell you where to get help.

There is also general information about what your child's school will be doing to prevent bullying happening in the first place.

Islington - Towards A Bully-Free Zone

Islington takes bullying seriously and is the only borough in London to have a full-time Anti-Bullying Co-ordinator.

An Anti-Bullying Steering Group put together Islington's borough-wide policy or 'Statement of Intent' on

bullying. The group meets regularly to monitor anti-bullying work in Islington schools and in the local community.

One of the guiding principles of Islington's policy, is acknowledging that bullying can, and does, happen in all schools and all other places that children and young people visit.

We do not tolerate bullying in Islington and we are committed to working with you and your child to prevent bullying happening in our borough. We want to make Islington a 'bully-free zone'.

So, what is bullying?

“Bullying is when someone **deliberately** hurts another or makes them feel unhappy. Bullying behaviour will be **repeated** and be difficult to defend against. Bullying may be **racist, sexist** or **homophobic**. People can be bullied for any reason; because of the way they look, because of their **religion**, their **age**, because of a learning or physical **disability**, where they live, their family, their **social class** or how well they are doing at school for example.”

Bullying can be emotional and/or physical, direct or indirect. Examples are given below:

- **Physical:** hitting, kicking, spitting, slapping, demanding money (extortion) etc
- **Verbal:** name calling, insults, racist, sexist, homophobic or sexual remarks, threats etc
- **Direct:** offensive or abusive emails, text messages or posts on websites - known as '**cyber-bullying**'
- **Indirect:** excluding or 'blanking', spreading gossip, graffiti or damaging property.

This is not a complete list, but gives examples of the forms bullying may take.

What bullying is not

Bullying is not a one-off incident. This does not mean that an isolated insult or attack on your child is not serious. Any incident affecting your child is serious and will be treated as such by your school.

Friends falling out for a day, or pupils having an argument, for example, is

not usually bullying. These are forms of relational conflict - which basically means disagreements or fall-outs between people who know each other and do not usually argue. Children need to be supported by school and home to deal with this, as it is something we all experience in our lives. But it does not necessarily mean they are being bullied.

So, what are we doing about it?

We are working hard to make Islington an even safer place for children to grow up and learn in. Here are some examples:

- Schools have been provided with Anti-Bullying Toolkits and resources.
- Every school in Islington has an Anti-Bullying Policy. This is a legal requirement. You can ask your child's school for a copy.
- All pupils are encouraged to report bullying when it affects them or one of their peers. We do not want any pupil to be a bystander to bullying. All schools have systems in place for pupils to safely report bullying.

- Schools work with pupils who have been bullied so that they can be safe, and those that have bullied others to stop them doing it again.
- We carry out annual pupil surveys in schools to check how well anti-bullying ideas are working and we ask children and young people for ideas about how we can do better.

What are some of the signs that your child may be being bullied?

1. Physical injuries which your child cannot or will not explain, especially if you notice these occurred during the school day
2. Torn or damaged clothing or belongings
3. Frequent illness without explanation such as headaches, stomach pains, tiredness
4. Frequent requests to be kept home due to illness or other reasons
5. Mood swings or not wanting to talk to anyone
6. Anxious, emotional, tearful
7. Lack of confidence/low self-esteem
8. Defensiveness
9. Lashing out against friends and/or school staff
10. Frequent unexplained loss of money or belongings
11. Change in school work, drop in standard
12. Leaving school late or early to avoid certain pupils on the school journey
13. Reluctance to play in the playground at break times
14. Not eating lunch, sudden weight loss
15. School refusal
16. Frequently hungry upon arriving home, though they are provided with lunch/lunch money

This is not a complete list and any of the above could be a sign that your child is in distress because of home, personal or school factors. If you notice any such signs in your child, make time to talk to them calmly and ask them if everything is ok. You may also want to talk to the school about whether they have noticed a change in your child's behaviour or mood.

When bullying becomes a crime

On **rare** occasions, bullying stops being bullying and becomes a crime. Any hate crime committed against your child – racist, sexist or homophobic abuse or assault for example could be a crime. Also, physical assault, theft, threats or stalking for example are crimes and in serious cases your child's school would have to involve the police. All Islington schools have a named School Based Police Officer (SBO) with whom they work closely. Primary schools share Police Community Support Officers who are based in a Police Station and work with several schools. All School Based Police Officers have been trained in a type of mediation called **Restorative Justice**.

If you want to ask for advice on bullying or your child's safety in or out of school, ask your school for the name and contact details of your School Based Officer (SBO).

What should your child's school be doing about bullying?

- It **must** have an **Anti-Bullying Policy** – this is a legal requirement
- This should be publicised and provided to new parents at enrolment
- The policy should cover bullying on the grounds of racism, sexism, homophobia, religion/faith and disability
- The policy should be reviewed by the whole-school annually, including by Governors
- Staff should receive regular training on spotting the signs of bullying and how to prevent bullying
- All reports of **'prejudice-motivated'** bullying and harassment – that is, bullying which is racist, sexist, homophobic or targeted at a disability or religion/belief, must be recorded by the school and the figures provided to Cambridge Education @ Islington every term

- Within PSHE & Citizenship, as part of the curriculum, your child should be doing work on friendships, difference, tolerance and dealing with conflict and bullying
- Peer support programs may be in operation, where pupils provide mentoring and leadership to younger pupils
- Friendship benches or stops in the playground may be in place to help pupils from feeling lonely and being vulnerable to bullying
- Pupils should be encouraged to talk to staff if they have problems and should feel that they can do this in safety
- You should be given clear contact details of staff in your school who deal with bullying and child protection issues

If you think your child is experiencing racist bullying then you should also request a copy of your school's Race Equality Policy. This Policy should also be mentioned in the Anti-Bullying Policy.

2. Keep notes - make an incident record Write down what your child tells you about the bullying:

- Date and time
- Where it took place
- Bystanders - did anyone witness the incident?
- Who is the alleged perpetrator?
- How has this affected your child?
- Have you noticed changes in your child's behaviour or mood?
- Did your child tell a member of staff?
- Did the member of staff do anything about it?

Bullying Diary

If the bullying continues keep a diary of the incidents your child has told you about, making sure you note down all the above information. Ask your child to do the same.

You think your child is being bullied at school - what should you do?

1. Request a copy of your school's Anti-Bullying Policy if you do not already have one.

This should spell out what you and your child can expect from the school if your child is being bullied

REMEMBER – If your child reports a serious assault by peers in school you have the right to phone the police and report this as a criminal assault.

In most circumstances we would recommend that you contact the school first to see if they have any record of the incident if they have not already contacted you. They will also be able to give you contact details for the police officer based in the school, the School Based Officer – SBO.

ALWAYS CALL 999 IN AN EMERGENCY

3. Talk to your child

Remember that it is highly likely that if your child is being bullied, they will not want to tell anyone. They may feel embarrassed, guilty or ashamed and may even think they deserve it.

Your child may be scared of being seen to 'tell tales' they may think the bullying will get worse if they tell. They may have been threatened by the bully not to tell

or they may feel childish asking their parents for help.

It is very positive if your child has come to you for help with bullying. Generally, research shows that children and young people will talk to friends before they seek support from parents/carers as they are often worried about 'making things worse'. It is therefore the sign of a strong relationship between you and your child that they trust you enough to ask for support with bullying.

Make sure you talk to them about what the options are, and try to make decisions together. Do tell your child before you do anything, and try to get their agreement before taking action.

Explain to your child that you will have to contact the school to try to stop the bullying. Be aware that your child may be anxious about you doing so, for all the above reasons. Try to reassure them that doing nothing will not make things change or get better.

Once you have agreed with your child to contact the school you can talk to a teacher in person, on the phone or in writing.

4. Talk to your child's class teacher or Head of Year

KEEP CONTACT WITH THE SCHOOL - TALK TO TEACHERS YOU KNOW AND TRUST

Usually, talking over your concerns with your child's class teacher or Head of Year will solve the problem.

Use the notes you have made to explain to the teacher exactly what your child told you happened and how it is affecting them.

Keep a note of the name of the teacher or member of staff that you speak to, the date of the meeting and what was discussed or agreed, whether this conversation was in person or on the phone.

If the teacher is unable to help you they may suggest you talk to the head teacher personally.

5. Talk to the head teacher

DO NOT BREAK CONTACT WITH THE SCHOOL - THIS IS VERY IMPORTANT. KEEP COMMUNICATION OPEN.

The head teacher is there to help your child achieve their full potential by providing a safe school environment. They care about your child and want to know if things go wrong.

Use the bullying incident record or notes you have made so you can explain clearly what your child has told you, with dates, places and times. This will help the school follow up your complaint quickly.

Make a list of what you want to say in the meeting and make sure all of it is covered. Tell the head teacher what you would like to be done about the bullying and try to give your own ideas. Tell them how the bullying is affecting your child at home and school.

If you do not understand something the head teacher says, ask them to explain. Do not be embarrassed to ask questions.

6. Write a formal letter

If you prefer, you can write a letter to the head teacher so there is a written record of your concerns. Make sure you cover all the issues as above.

You should address the letter to the head teacher. Be clear about what has been happening, how it has affected your child and what you would like to be done about it. Look at the School's Anti-Bullying Policy where it explains how bullying will be dealt with and what pupils and parents can expect. Check to see if they are doing what they say they will do.

A sample letter is shown on page 14. Keep copies of all letters you send to the school.

Hopefully, the school will deal with your report of bullying and the bullying will stop. But if you need to, there are formal complaint procedures to help you take things further.

By law, all schools MUST have a complaints procedure. This is a legal requirement under Section 29 of the Education Act 2002. The procedure will explain how to complain if you are not happy with the service you get from the school. It will set out what the school should do in response to a complaint and how long it will take to deal with it. You can ask the school office for a copy of the

school's complaints procedure. Cambridge Education @ Islington also has a Complaints Officer who can give you general advice about how to make a formal complaint. However, please note that it is the individual school, and not the Education Authority (Cambridge Education @ Islington) that normally deals with complaints and each school will have a slightly different process. Useful numbers are included at the back of this booklet.

DO NOT REMOVE YOUR CHILD FROM SCHOOL - YOUR CHILD HAS DONE NOTHING WRONG AND SHOULD NOT BE DENIED THEIR RIGHT TO AN EDUCATION. IT IS UP TO YOUR SCHOOL TO ENSURE IT IS A SAFE PLACE FOR ALL CHILDREN.

7. Write to the Chair of Governors

If you are not satisfied with the response from the head teacher then you can contact the Clerk to the Governors to discuss your complaint and for advice on what to do next.

They can tell you how to make a complaint to the Board of Governors if you are still not happy. You can ask the school office to make an appointment with the Clerk.

Remember to use your bullying incident record or notes to clearly explain to the Clerk what has happened. Give details of staff names and what they did about the bullying report, with dates where possible. The more information you can provide, the easier it will be for the Board of Governors to investigate and deal with your complaint quickly.

8. If you are still not satisfied

Some schools have an appeals procedure, which means the Board of Governors would meet again to look at your complaint if you were not happy with how it was dealt with the first time.

Your school's Complaints Procedure will tell you how to do this and the Clerk to the Governors can give you advice. If you have tried all these options and are still not happy with how the school has dealt with your complaint then please do come back to Cambridge Education @ Islington

to find out how we can help you. Ultimately you have the right to complain to the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families if you are not satisfied with previous responses. However, in most cases, issues are sorted out well before this stage through the school's Complaints Procedure, and/or with the help of Cambridge Education @ Islington.

9. Do not remove your child from school

In some cases it can be a criminal offence to remove your child from school under Section 444(1) of the Education Act 1996.

This can mean a fine of up to £2,500 and/or a maximum three-month prison sentence.

In almost all cases you will be able to sort out your concern about bullying by working in partnership with your child's school and shouldn't need to make a formal complaint.

10. If your child is assaulted

Your child's school may well see this as a crime and may report it to the police officer based in the school, the School Based Officer.

The school should contact you immediately to inform you of what has happened. It is likely that they will ask you to come into the school for a meeting to discuss the incident as soon as possible.

In any serious incident your school will contact the emergency services first and then inform you immediately.

The school should provide you with a report of what happened, what they have done to investigate the incident and if anything has been done about it.

After investigation the school may invite you and the parents of the pupil your child has reported for assault, to a meeting in the school.

Where to get help

For advice on all forms of bullying and free confidential support contact:

Parentline Plus

0808 800 2222

www.parentlineplus.org.uk

For independent advice on how schools should respond to bullying and complaints, as well as advice on bullying contact:

The Advisory Centre for Education (ACE)

0808 800 5793

www.ace-ed.org.uk

If your child has physical or learning disabilities and is experiencing bullying you can access useful information and support from:

MENCAP

www.mencap.org.uk/html/campaigns/anti_bullying/index.asp

For general advice on bullying or school complaints procedures contact the following officers at Cambridge Education @ Islington:

Anti-Bullying Coordinator

Finn Mackay

020 7527 5744

finn.mackay.camb-ed@islington.gov.uk

Complaints Officer

Mervin Ellis

020 7527 5786

mervin.ellis.camb-ed@islington.gov.uk

Sample letter to the Headteacher to raise your concerns

Date

Dear (name of Headteacher)

RE: Bullying concern

I wish to raise my concerns that my child (insert full name) is being bullied in school/by pupils at the school.

My child has informed me of the following incidents (insert incidents from your bullying incident record, with dates and locations if possible, any bystanders, alleged perpetrators etc).

I informed members of staff (insert names and dates of times when you spoke to the class teacher or Head of Year) and we discussed the following options (detail what you discussed). (You should write why you were not happy with their response, whether your child is alleging that the bullying is still taking place).

I am concerned for the welfare of my child and would like to meet with you to discuss how to resolve this situation and enable my child to enjoy school safely.

I am available for a meeting on (insert dates and times)

Yours sincerely

Signature

Name



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