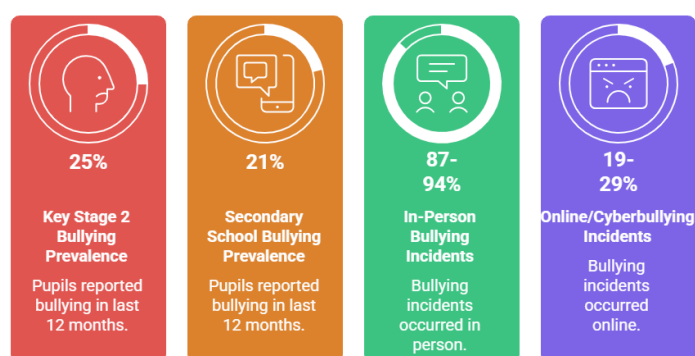


Your Child and Bullying: A Parent's Practical Guide to Taking Action

This Anti-Bullying Week (11th-15th November 2025) offers a timely opportunity to talk about what parents can do if their child experiences bullying. Research from major UK studies, including the ALSPAC cohort and UK Household Longitudinal Study, consistently shows that **informed, supportive parenting** is the most powerful protective factor for children facing bullying. This guide provides a clear, evidence-based action plan, from recognising the signs to working effectively with schools and building your child's resilience..

Bullying Prevalence and Type



1. Is It Bullying? How to Spot the Signs

Sometimes children tell you exactly what's happening. More often, they don't. Office for National Statistics data (2023) found that about 18% of children experiencing online bullying didn't tell anyone at all.

Bullying isn't a one-off fight; it's behaviour that is repeated, intentional, and involves an imbalance of power. Look for these patterns:

- **Emotional changes:** Withdrawal, anxiety, sudden mood swings, or noticeable drops in self-esteem.
- **Social changes:** Avoiding friends or social events, not wanting to go to school, dropping hobbies they used to love.
- **Physical signs:** Sleep problems, frequent complaints of feeling unwell (especially on school mornings), damaged or "lost" belongings.

These signs vary by age. Younger children may show physical symptoms like tummy aches, whilst teenagers might withdraw from social media or become secretive about their online activity.

2. The First Conversation: What to Do When They Tell You

This is the most critical moment. Research from YoungMinds and the NSPCC shows that children often don't disclose bullying because they fear parental over-reaction. Your first job is to make them feel safe and heard.

What to DO:

- **Believe them** without question and stay calm. NHS guidance emphasises that visible distress can frighten children into silence.
- **Praise their courage.** "Thank you for telling me. You have done the right thing."
- **Listen to understand, not to fix.** Research from Action for Children's Parent Talk programme shows active listening is key to building trust. Ensure you full attention and ask open questions like, "What happened next?" or "How did that make you feel?"

What NOT to DO:

- **Don't overreact.** Family Lives research confirms that threats to "march into that school" are a child's worst fear; they believe it will make the bullying escalate.
- **Don't promise total secrecy.** Instead say: "I won't do anything without talking to you first, but we'll need to work with the school. We will decide together."
- **Don't encourage retaliation.** Telling your child to "hit them back" can put them in more danger.

Need immediate support? For your child: Childline (0800 1111, 24/7) | For you: YoungMinds Parents Helpline (0808 802 5544) and NSPCC Helpline (0808 800 5000)

3. Your 3-Step Action Plan

Step 1: Gather the Facts

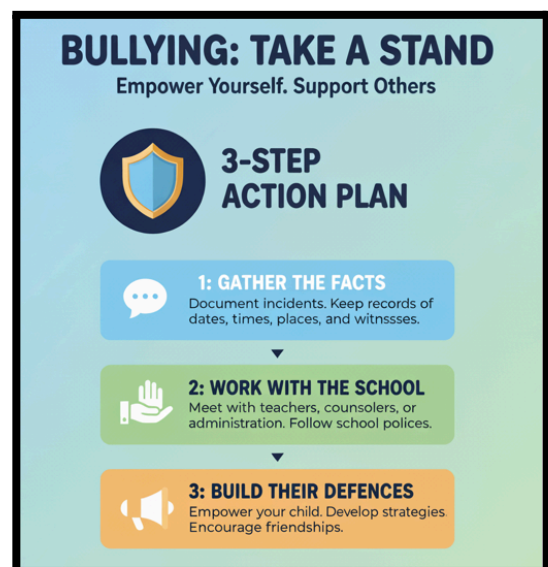
Keep a written, dated log of every incident. The Anti-Bullying Alliance and Kidscape both emphasise that this turns vague feelings into concrete evidence.

Record: date, time, location, who was involved, what was said or done, and how your child was affected. For cyberbullying, take screenshots immediately—capture usernames, dates, times, and complete messages before doing anything else.

Step 2: Work With the School

Email their form tutor or Head of Year to request a meeting. All state schools in England are legally required (Education and Inspections Act 2006) to have an anti-bullying policy—read it before your meeting.

Frame it as a shared problem. Present your log calmly and ask: "What specific actions will the school take? Who will be my child's key contact? When can we meet again to review progress?"



YoungMinds recommends sending an email afterwards summarising what was agreed. If there's no improvement within 1-2 weeks, escalate to the head teacher, then governors, then multi-academy trust.

Step 3: Build Their Defences

This is your most important job. Research shows your support at home is crucial.

- **Find their 'island of competence.'** The ALSPAC cohort study found that children's belief in their own abilities, particularly their scholastic competence, is a powerful long-term protective factor. Help them find activities where they feel confident: a hobby, club, or school subject, anything from coding to drama, music, sport, or art. This builds self-esteem that the bullying can't touch.
- **Encourage other friendships.** The UK Household Longitudinal Study confirms that friendships are powerful protective factors. Help them connect with friends outside school through sports clubs, community groups, or family events.
- **Be their secure base, not their bulldozer.** The East London schools study found that moderate family support was more protective than over-protection, because over-protection can reduce children's assertiveness. Rather than emailing the school without telling them, say: "I think we need to tell your form tutor. Would you like to write down what happened, or shall we do it together?"

4. The Cyberbullying Challenge

Research from Ofcom shows that when bullying occurs among 8-17 year olds, 84% of incidents now happen on or via devices. Cyberbullying feels different because it's 24/7, potentially anonymous, and can reach unlimited audiences.

Your action plan:

- **Screenshot first:** Capture complete evidence—messages, usernames, dates, times.
- **Block:** Block the accounts on all platforms.
- **Report:** Use in-app reporting tools. The Report Harmful Content service (reportharmfulcontent.com) provides guidance across all platforms.
- **For intimate images:** Childline's Report Remove tool (childline.org.uk/report-remove) helps get sexual images taken down and prevents redistribution.

CRITICAL: Do NOT take away their phone. The NSPCC strongly warns that this makes your child feel punished for being the victim. Research shows 78% of cyberbullying victims now seek parental support because they need help with evidence and reporting. Taking devices away isolates them from supportive friends and teaches them: "Don't tell my parents next time."

When cyberbullying becomes criminal: Report to police (101, or 999 if immediate danger) if incidents involve threats of harm, sexual abuse, hate crime, behaviour encouraging self-harm, or persistent harassment after other interventions have failed.



5. Rebuilding and Recovering

Recovery continues long after the bullying stops. UK research tracking victims into adulthood found that even those who avoided clinical depression showed lower wellbeing than non-victimised peers—support cannot stop when the bullying does.

- **Don't let it dominate family life.** Keep doing normal, fun things. Family Lives emphasises actively asking about the good parts of their day to help rebalance their focus.
- **Maintain daily life and positive experiences.** YoungMinds research emphasises not letting bullying consume everything. Help your child develop new skills through activities that build confidence and offer chances to make friends outside the bullying context.
- **Know when to seek professional help.** Research shows that Cognitive Behavioural Therapy significantly reduces depression and anxiety in bullying victims. If you see signs of anxiety or low mood that aren't lifting, speak to the school counsellor or your GP about local services like CAMHS.

Remember: Research from multiple UK studies confirms that about 85% of bullying victims do not develop clinical depression, demonstrating significant capacity for resilience when protective factors are present. Your support, your belief in them, and your calm, informed action are the most powerful tools your child has. This Anti-Bullying Week, let's choose respect—and choose to stand with our children as they navigate one of childhood's toughest challenges.

6. Where to Get Help

For Your Child (24/7):

- Childline: 0800 1111 | [childline.org.uk](https://www.childline.org.uk)
- Shout: Text SHOUT to 85258
- Samaritans: 116 123

For You (Parent Advice):

- YoungMinds Parents Helpline: 0808 802 5544
- NSPCC Helpline: 0808 800 5000
- Kidscape: 0300 102 4481
- Family Lives: 0808 800 2222

For Online Safety:

- UK Safer Internet Centre: saferinternet.org.uk
- Report Harmful Content: reportharmfulcontent.com
- Report Remove: childline.org.uk/report-remove

For Everything:

- Anti-Bullying Alliance: anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk

North Somerset Educational Psychology Service. November 2025