

Grandparent guide to bullying and digital safety

Grandparents have a crucial role in the lives of children and young people. More and more grandparents spend hours caring for their grandchildren and want to do all they can to be a loving, caring presence in their lives.

As a grandparent you may be wondering what is going on in the world with the media reports of bullying, cyberbullying and harassment and we want to make sure that grandparents feel equipped to support a child going through a bullying situation.

With the rapid growth in technology you may feel less in touch with the places and spaces your grandchild spends

their time but you don't have to be a technical wizard to draw alongside your grandchild and give practical advice.

- 1 in 4 working families and 1 in 3 working mothers use grandparents for childcare
- 63% of all grandparents with grandchildren under 16 help out with childcare
- 1 in 5 grandmothers provide at least 10 hours a week of childcare
- the proportion of grandparents who are of working age is set to grow as the retirement age gradually rises (Department for Work and Pensions)

Common questions about bullying

What is bullying?

Bullying is any behaviour that is intended to cause harm, is repeated, and where it is hard for the person or people on the receiving end to defend themselves.

Cyberbullying is bullying behaviour by electronic means (e.g. posting messages online or sending photos or videos with the intention to humiliate and harm another person).

What's the difference between bullying and teasing?

Teasing is generally not intended to hurt someone's feelings and is most commonly experienced between friends or family.

Teasing can become bullying behaviour if it ridicules or embarrasses another person, it is repeated and where it is hard for the other person to defend themselves.

It is also important that children do not use words or names that are offensive. Be on the watch as children may feel under pressure to say something is just teasing or 'banter' when it is clearly bullying/offensive behaviour. For example, if there is a friendship group and one child is continually called a nickname that is offensive or embarrassing even if they appear to laugh it off (e.g. chubster, geek, boffin, batty boy).

How many children are bullied?

There have been many research studies into bullying in the UK. Statistics can vary but suggest that around a third of children experience bullying at some point, with at least one child in every class experiencing severe bullying (bullying that happens on a daily or weekly basis).

The most common forms of bullying are name calling and exclusion from social groups but it can take many forms including theft and manipulation (e.g. being forced to hand over money or belongings), physical (e.g. kicking, hitting, pushing, spitting) or sexual (e.g. unwanted touch and comments).

Are some children more vulnerable to bullying?

Yes. While anyone can be a target for bullying behaviour, disabled children and those with special educational needs, children that identify or are seen to identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual and/or transgender, children of minority ethnic and/or faith groups, young carers and children in care are more likely to be targeted.

Children that bully others often look to target 'difference'. This means that it

could be almost anything – the colour of your hair, your size or your trainers.

What might be the signs that my grandchild is experiencing bullying?

Look out for changes in behaviour. Are they becoming increasingly withdrawn and sad or acting out and difficult to manage? They may be more secretive than usual or seem upset when they come in from school, or after using their mobile phones or tablets. Sometimes clothes may be torn and belongings or money missing. They may even have unexplained physical injuries.

Do schools in the UK have to take action against bullying?

Yes. Every school has a legal duty to keep children and young people safe from bullying and harassment.

How can I help my grandchild in a bullying situation?

- **Let them know they can tell you anything.** Stay calm – even if what they tell you makes you angry or upset.
- **Be clear bullying is not their fault,** they have done the right thing in telling you and that you will do all you can to help.
- **Encourage them to tell Mum/Dad/ foster carer if they can.** Offer to help them have this conversation if necessary.
- **Talk about who else might be able to help.** Identify a teacher or another adult in the school who they could speak to about the bullying. Also talk about friends and other children who could be a support.

- **Suggest that they keep a diary** or log of incidents that they can share with their teacher.
- **Talk about ways they can take a stand** against those doing the bullying that doesn't involve using physical force. For example saying 'No!' in a firm voice. Or 'Stop – I don't like it'. You may even want to practice this together.
- **Focus on the areas of their life that give them pleasure** and raise their esteem. Encourage hobbies where they can mix with other young people

and build a friendship group outside of school.

- **If you have worries about their personal safety then take action.** Talk to their parent or carer and if they are facing an immediate threat then contact the police.
- **Do not ignore concerns about self-harm or suicidal thoughts.** Gently explore who they have shared their thoughts and feelings with. Encourage their parent or carer to take them to the GP. If you are their main carer then seek medical advice.

The digital world

Your grandchild may spend quite a bit of their time on their mobile phone, tablet or other electronic device/ devices. This is typical behaviour and there is lots that is great about the digital world. Here are our tips for how you can help your grandchild stay safe online:

1. **Be interested in what your grandchild is doing online;** ask them to show you how it works, the games they are playing, the films or music they like to watch or make and who they enjoy talking to. If the people seem quite a bit older than them, the games or films scary or brutal, or your grandchild seems to be sharing too many private details – gently say so. Trust your instinct.
2. **Negotiate boundaries:** for example, agree how long they should spend doing different activities both on and offline, and check that any games and apps are age appropriate. Coax them to spend some time with you offline playing games or going for a walk. It's these times they will remember. Check in with them to see if their digital use is impacting on their sleep. Encourage them to switch off before bedtime and find other ways to wind down.
3. **Let them know you are there for them.** If anything they read, see or hear online worries or scares them you may not know the tech but you have a lot of life experience. You can help them work out what may be truth and what might be fiction ('fake news'). You can also help them see the difference between real friends that love you and make you feel good, and false 'friends' and followers who bring you down.
4. **Try using apps and social media yourself** – ask your grandchild to show you how!
5. **Look out for signs** that your grandchild is unusually sad or withdrawn, or seem anxious or upset after using their phones, tablets or devices. It may be that they are experiencing cyberbullying or are being harassed or exploited in other ways Gently explore what is bringing them down and see whether they can share it with you.

6. **Help them report bullying or offensive content** to the social network provider. It's important that your grandchild doesn't retaliate, and that they consider blocking or muting the person that is causing them harm (though they may not want to do this if it is a member of their peer group). Explore whether they want to take a screenshot/save the evidence so they have the option of sharing with the school.
7. **Support them with keeping a perspective on events.** Being on the receiving end of offensive or harmful comments online can feel terrible but conversations online tend to move along quickly – particularly if you don't respond.
8. **Encourage your grandchild to be a good digital citizen.** This means not sharing or liking harmful, or offensive content and doing what they can to support others and share positive content online.

Help!

Visit www.kidscape.org.uk for further advice and guidance. You will also find details of our Parent Advice line that we encourage grandparents to call. You can also sign up for our Parent and Carer email newsletter at bit.ly/kidscapenewsletter so you can stay on top of news and tips for keeping your grandchild safe.

About Kidscape

Kidscape is the UK's leading anti-bullying charity. Our vision is for all children to grow up in a world free from bullying and harm, with adults who keep them safe and help them reach their full potential. Our mission is to provide children, families, carers and professionals with advice, training and practical tools to prevent bullying and protect young lives.

We want to hear from you

We welcome any thoughts or comments on this guide. Email zoe@kidscape.org.uk

