



Flourishing children
Help your child to thrive



Introduction

Having children can be one of the most fulfilling experiences of our lives. They become the centre of our world and there is little we wouldn't do for them. However, this deep and unconditional love means we are hit hard when something goes wrong.

From infancy to adulthood, our children will face many problems. While we may be unable to prevent these, we can support our children and help them prepare for life's challenges.

This booklet addresses the common issues our children face at different stages in their lives. For each issue, we have provided a list of suggestions of things we can do as parents to help.

We hope you will keep this booklet and use it as your child passes through the different stages of development. The route to adulthood can sometimes be a rocky and difficult one for children, but if we as parents know what to look out for and what to do for the best, our children can grow and flourish to their full potential.

Common issues in 0-6 year olds

At this age, children rely entirely on their parents and guardians for love and care. You have the power to influence how your child grows and develops, shaping them into the person they will become. These are the most important years for development, when your child will learn to walk, talk and will grow in confidence and self-esteem. Their imagination will flourish, their personality will begin to form and their capabilities and unique insights will constantly surprise us. Unfortunately, this plasticity in learning from the surrounding world also leaves a child vulnerable to problems that could damage them long after they leave our constant care.



Attachment

The attachment between child and caregiver is crucial in early life. It is the first bond your child will experience and sets the precedent for future relationships. Babies are most likely to form attachments with those who respond accurately to their needs rather than those they spend the most time with. It is therefore not necessarily the person who feeds and changes the baby that will have the strongest bond, but the person who can communicate best with the child.

If babies can form a secure bond with their caregivers they will be greatly advantaged in later life. Those who are securely attached develop optimism, trust, confidence and security. This enables them to build self-esteem and cope with life's ups and downs. They will also be better placed to form healthy, close relationships when they go out into the world.

Poor attachment

Unfortunately, not all children form secure attachments and this can have a detrimental effect on their thoughts and behaviour later in life. Although, it is normally only the most poorly nurtured infants that develop attachment disorders, many others still suffer from attachment issues.

If a caregiver rejects a child or is unavailable when needed, the child can develop avoidant insecure attachment. This can result in emotional disengagement as they have learnt that emotional expressions such as crying do not get attention. This lack of emotional awareness leads to a tendency to hide feelings and not express negative emotions later on in life. They are unlikely to ask for help as they believe no one will respond and might struggle to form relationships due to fear of rejection.

Sometimes a caregiver can be inconsistent in their behaviour towards the child. One moment they may be quick and responsive to the child's needs and the next they may ignore them (perhaps responding to physical needs like feeding but not emotional needs such as touching). This leads

to ambivalent insecure attachment causing the child to have a confused self-image. The child may feel misunderstood. Furthermore, they may not learn or understand their own or others' feelings as they have not been provided with enough stability to establish the variety and depth of human emotions.

If the caregiver is violent or a source of a terror it can lead to disorganised insecure attachment. When a caregiver is abusive, the child can become very distressed as they naturally want to run away or fight, but the caregiver is also the person they want to go to when they are hurt. As a result, the child may completely emotionally disengage and have difficulties with social communication and more severe emotional problems.

Helping ensure a secure attachment

- Touch and make eye contact with your child.
- Learn your baby's cues and respond to them.
- Share with your infant's delight - this helps build an emotional connection.
- Empathise with your child's feelings and comfort and reassure them – they will sense your attunement.
- Maintain a predictable and safe environment.
- Stay consistent with their schedule and limits and your parental responses.
- Take care of yourself - you will respond to your baby better if you are in an alert state.
- Laugh and share happiness with your baby.
- Don't try to be the perfect parent – most parents struggle to guess what their baby wants every time. As long as you notice a missed cue and attempt to resolve it your connection will stay intact.

How to help a child with ADHD

It is still not clear what causes ADHD so it is difficult to prevent. However, early diagnosis from a professional (your GP can refer you) and some simple steps can make a big difference.

Keep healthy - Ensure your child is eating healthily and exercising which can go a long way in reducing their hyperactivity.

Guide your child - Children with ADHD generally have deficits in their ability to plan, organise and control their impulses. You will therefore need to provide extra guidance while your child acquires these skills. Try to be patient and understanding with your child.

Create structure - Structure can help children with ADHD understand what to expect and what is expected from them so they are more likely to succeed in completing tasks. Keeping your home organised helps your child learn where to find things and will help them organise themselves.

Take a break - Caring for a child with ADHD can be exhausting, so it is important to make time for yourself. If you are tired and have run out of patience you may lose sight of the structure and support you have set for your child. Being calm and focused enables you to connect with your child and helps them relax and concentrate on a task. Don't feel bad about taking a break and accepting a family member or friend's offer to babysit. It will help you stay positive and healthy and to cope better.

Seek professional help - Your GP will be able to prescribe certain drugs such as Ritalin and Adderall to help control your child's ADHD. However, a good therapist can help you develop a structured routine that your child can follow and help establish concrete goals for behaviour and achievement. Behavioural therapy has proved successful for many children with ADHD and uses praise and rewards to encourage good behaviour (such as putting up hand before answering a question) and decreasing poor behaviour by setting limits and consequences.

Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder

Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) currently affects about 1.7 per cent of the UK population, most of whom are children. It causes sufferers to become easily distracted and have a very short attention span. Childhood ADHD appears before the age of seven and it is important to understand the symptoms and not just dismiss them as part of being young and excitable.

Symptoms and signs

Children suffering from ADHD are excessively hyperactive, impulsive and inattentive compared to their peers. To be classified as childhood ADHD, impairments have to have appeared before the age of seven and last for at least six months. Deficits also have to be present in at least two different settings (e.g. classroom and home) to ensure the child is not simply being stimulated by certain surroundings. Other symptoms that indicate your child may be suffering from ADHD include:

- **Inattention**
 - Trouble keeping attention on tasks
 - No close attention to detail and careless mistakes made
 - Does not listen when being spoken to directly or follow instructions
 - Forgetful in daily activities and easily loses things
 - Unable to stick at tasks that are tedious or time consuming
- **Hyperactivity**
 - Fidgets with hands or feet, squirms in seat
 - Excessive talking
 - Trouble playing quietly
 - Runs around or climbs when it is not appropriate
- **Impulsiveness**
 - Blurts out answers before questions are completed
 - Trouble waiting for their turn
 - Interrupts or intrudes on others (e.g. disturbs other children's games)

Common issues in 6-12 year olds

When children reach this age they are slowly becoming independent. Their significant relationship might no longer be with you but rather with their peers as they start to look to them for help and support. Your child is now capable of learning, creating and accomplishing numerous new skills and knowledge and you will begin to see the person they will become. This is a very social stage of development but unfortunately this means any feelings of inadequacy or inferiority among their peers now can lead to serious problems in terms of competence and self-esteem later in life. At this stage you must learn to balance taking a back seat in order to help them become independent while supporting and nurturing them to make them feel loved.



Friendship trouble

As children grow older, their friends become greater influences on their lives. 6- 12 years old is a crucial time for children to develop their social skills and learn from others and you will be able to see their transition from playing alone to having multiple friends and social groups. However, some children have more difficulty with this than others and a conspicuous lack of party invites or seeing your child sitting alone can cause a great deal of anxiety.

Importance of friends

There are many benefits to your child having friends. Peer relationships are essential to help your child develop social skills such as sensitivity to other points of view, rules of conversation and sex and age appropriate behaviour. Between the ages of 6-12 friendships become less about convenience (e.g. neighbours) and instead are based on trust and reciprocity. This helps build your child's confidence and self-esteem and enables them to tackle the challenges of growing up. Evidence suggests children who lack friends can suffer emotional and mental difficulties in later life and be less capable of controlling their own emotions and responding to the emotions of others. Finally and perhaps most importantly, children with friends generally have more fun!

What to do if your child is having friendship problems

If you are worried by your child's lack of friends, do not panic. All children have blips in friendships or your child may genuinely enjoy playing alone. The chances are they will make friends over time. Remember, it is only a problem if your child is unhappy. If you feel this is the case there are steps you can take to help them:

- Try not to intervene - instead try to support your child.
- Listen to your child's worries – talking about the problem may reduce their anxiety.
- Do not make it into a big deal – your child will feel they have disappointed you.
- Find opportunities to watch how your child interacts such as volunteering to help on a school trip – this can give you an idea why they are having difficulty.
- Praise and reward good social skills.
- Be a good role model – let your child see you being polite and friendly to new acquaintances and being considerate and cooperative with your own friends.
- Create a welcome environment for your child's friends – have snacks ready but leave them alone. This will encourage more play dates and solidify friendships.
- If your child has behavioural problems, set up a monitored and structured play date. Watching over your child while they, for example, bake with a friend means you can prevent unfriendly behaviour occurring while keeping them interested in a task.

“Brothers and sisters are as close as hands and feet”

Vietnamese proverb

Sibling rivalry

When you and your partner decided to have another child, you probably thought of giving your child a playmate and lifetime best friend. However, this is rarely the case. It is natural for children to squabble. It is how they sort out problems and work out their place in the family, but it can be exhausting for parents trying to constantly resolve their conflicts.

It can be upsetting and frustrating watching your children fight and be cruel to one another, and can create a very stressful household. Friction between siblings typically peaks between the ages of 8 and 12, when children become physically stronger and more opinionated but are still spending large amounts of time at home and therefore with each other. With 80% of parents having more than one child, most of us will inevitably have to deal with sibling rivalry, but there are steps you can take to help resolve these conflicts. Remember, it is normal for children to fight with their siblings and, when they reach adulthood, it is their brothers and sisters that will provide them with the strongest bonds.

Acknowledge their feelings

When your child comes to you distressed because of something a sibling did, do not dismiss their feelings. Instead of saying things such as “You don’t mean that, you love her really”, acknowledge their anger by saying something like, “I understand, that must have been upsetting for you”. If your child feels understood it should ease their anger and stop them feeling victimised. In addition, if your child feels you have acknowledged the upset their sibling has caused, they will be less likely to perform the action themselves as they fully appreciate how it makes someone else feel.

Avoid comparisons

Sibling rivalry is most common when children are close together in age or are the same sex. This is because they can easily compare themselves or are often compared by others. Although it may not be intentional, it is easy to make comments that make a child feel better or worse than their sibling and thus cause rivalry.

Avoid unfavourable comparisons such as, “How come your brother can manage to clean his own dishes?” This will make your child believe you prefer their sibling and can cause resentment between them. Instead describe the problem by simply stating what you see, “I notice you haven’t cleaned your dishes”. Your child will understand what they need to do without feeling inadequate in comparison to their sibling.

On the other hand, you should also avoid favourable comparisons. Comments such as, “I wish your brother would study as well as you” can make your child feel and behave in a superior way to their sibling. It is right to praise your child for their hard work but try avoiding putting their sibling down in the process.

Do not treat your children equally

Sometimes one child needs more attention than the other. This should not be a problem provided the other child understands you love them just as much. For instance if one of your children is ill, they will need more care. This does not mean you should ignore your other child. Nor should you try giving them equal attention, but rather explain that right now their sick sibling needs special care and when they are better you will make sure the two of you do something really fun.

At meal times, children will often argue about not having as much food as their sibling. Instead of meticulously trying to give them equal amounts, focus on each child's individual requirements. Ask them whether they want a little or a large amount so they feel more in control and concentrate on their own needs rather than comparing themselves to a sibling.

Siblings often argue about who you love more and may ask you if they are your favourite child, and your response will probably be, "I love you both equally". However, this makes neither child feel special. A response such as, "Each of you is very special to me, you are my only 'Jane' in the whole world and no-one could ever take your place", would make 'Jane' feel special and uniquely loved without causing sibling rivalry.

Do not give your children roles

It can be easy to put your children into categories, such as the brave one or the mean one. However, this can be a self-fulfilling prophecy and children can find it hard to escape their role. Try to avoid comments such as, "Why are you always so mean to your sister?" This makes one child feel like a bully and the other feel like a victim and they will continue to act as these characters. Instead say, "I know you can act kindly towards your sister and I expect you to right now," This shows the child you believe they can act better and encourages them to do so.



Avoiding physical fighting

Is it play fighting? If one child is not enjoying it or if you feel it is too rough then put a stop to it.

Acknowledge their anger. A phrase such as "I see you are both very upset with each other" will show them you understand this is something important to them.

Listen to each child's side with respect.

Describe back to them the situation. For example explaining, "Two sisters both want to colour in the same book," will take them away from their own emotions and they will begin to think of a solution.

Allow them to cool off. If you feel they are still too angry, separate them to have a cooling off period. Otherwise express your belief that they are capable of working out a mutually agreeable solution and leave them alone.

Encourage verbal expression. Teach your children that verbally expressing their feelings is a better way to reach a desirable outcome.

How to help a child with dyslexia

If your child is showing symptoms of dyslexia there are many things you can do to help.

At school

Speak to your child's school about providing suitable help and support. They may already have a system in place, however many schools are not equipped to deal with dyslexia so a more proactive approach may be required.

First, outline your concerns and explain why you believe your child is dyslexic. The teacher may be able to support your child's needs.

If you still feel your child is not receiving the correct support you should make an appointment with the Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO) at the school. They will be able to create an Individual Education Plan that should help the school support your child's learning. Arrange to meet regularly with the school to monitor your child's progress.

If you feel the Individual Education Plan is not working, or feel it is not being correctly implemented, you can ask for an assessment by an educational psychologist, although this may take some time.

At home

Read aloud with your child every day - this helps to build up their vocabulary and develops their ability to understand the meanings of words. It is also an excellent bonding activity.

Organise tasks - Help organise tasks such as homework into smaller and more manageable chunks to make it seem less daunting.

Believe in your child - The more you believe in your child's abilities the more confidence they will have. Talk to them regularly about their progress and praise them for it, encouraging them to enrol in after school activities and highlight successful people with dyslexia (such as Richard Branson or Winston Churchill). This should help them gain confidence and realise dyslexia does not have to hold them back.

Dyslexia

It is estimated that one in nine people in the UK have dyslexia – a specific type of learning difficulty that mainly affects the sufferer's skills in reading and the spelling of words. It is usually spotted at primary school age when children are developing their skills in reading and writing but have not yet adopted any strategies to disguise their difficulties.

Dyslexia is not linked to intelligence, in fact Albert Einstein suffered from it. Instead, there is a discrepancy between ability and attainment, such as being bright and having a large vocabulary, but not being able to translate this into writing. These differences in the way a dyslexic's brain processes work, particularly in relation to language, have led experts to assume that dyslexia is related to genetics. This is supported by evidence that dyslexia often runs in families.

Many people use the term dyslexia synonymously with learning difficulties. However, dyslexics specifically have problems with words. There are many other types of learning difficulty. For example dyspraxia results in motor difficulties and dysgraphia in writing difficulties.

Signs and symptoms of dyslexia

Dyslexia is a spectrum disorder, meaning sufferers can be affected at varying levels from mild to severe. The consequence of this is that it is often difficult to spot in some children and can go unnoticed. Teachers are normally trained to spot the signs of dyslexia, but you should also be alert as the earlier your child is diagnosed the sooner they can receive the necessary support. Symptoms vary in breadth and severity from one individual to another, but many include the following features:

- Reading and spelling difficulties - ability well below chronological age
- Confusing letters and words. For example: 'b' and 'd' or 'saw' and 'was'
- Poor handwriting and inconsistent spelling of words
- Confusing left and right
- Difficulties with concentrating
- Bad behaviour - children (especially boys) may become frustrated when they are unable to do something
- Problems copying from the board
- Skipping or adding words when reading
- Reversing numbers such as 34 rather than 43.
- Can be clumsy and uncoordinated.

Common issues in 12-18 year olds

Having a child enter their teenage years can cause parents a great deal of anxiety, with many worrying their child will succumb to the pressures of drugs, alcohol and underage sex. Your child is going through an intense period of growth, not only physically but also morally and intellectually, so it is understandable you might feel confused and anxious. However, the teenage years are when your child grows into an adult. You will often be left astounded by their strong affiliations and devotion to ideals, causes and friends. Their sense of morality has developed and you can be proud of the person your child has become. However, they still face many challenges and they need you to support and guide them into adulthood.



Adolescent depression

Most adolescents experience anguish and melancholy. However, there are many teenagers whose low moods are stronger and more enduring than the results of changing hormones. Adolescent depression is estimated to affect 5-9% of teenagers and that number is on the increase, making it a common concern for parents. Depression is different from just acting out or feeling blue. It can completely overshadow your child's personality with a sense of anger, sadness and despair.

How to help a depressed adolescent

- **Communicate.** Try to talk to your child about how they are feeling and the causes for this. If they are unwilling to open up, encourage them to write a letter.
- **Offer support.** Make sure they know you are there for them, fully and unconditionally.
- **Validate their feelings.** If they open up to you, acknowledge their pain, even if the problem seems trivial to you.
- **Speak to the school.** If they are being bullied or are stressed with their workload the school should be able to offer extra support or keep an eye on them.
- **Encourage exercise and healthy eating.**
- **Seek professional help.** Counsellors and psychologists can help find the cause of depression and support your teenager on the road to recovery. You can also speak to your GP for advice.

Causes of depression

A number of factors can cause depression including bullying, school pressures or failures, confusion over sexual orientation, bereavement, family problems or life changing events, but sometimes the reasons may be unclear.

Symptoms of depression

Unlike adults, teenagers often are not able to seek help alone and so it is sometimes up to you to spot the signs and symptoms of adolescent depression. If your child experiences the following symptoms over a two-week period for most of the day or every day, speak to your GP.

- Depressed mood
- Irritable or angry mood
- Diminished interest or pleasure
- Significant weight changes
- Sleep problems: insomnia or hypersomnia
- Restlessness
- Fatigue or loss of energy
- Feelings of worthlessness / excessive or inappropriate guilt
- Diminished ability to think or concentrate, or indecisiveness
- Recurrent thoughts of death/ suicide
- Extreme sensitivity to criticism
- Withdrawing from some people (unlike depressed adults, teenagers usually keep up some of their friendships)

How to help an adolescent with an eating disorder

If you notice any symptoms of an eating disorder or if you are concerned about any aspect of your child's eating habits it is important you tackle the problem. It is not something that will simply go away.

Talking to your child is key, especially if they do not understand they have a problem. Approach the subject carefully and when your child is comfortable. You do not want them to feel as if they are being attacked. Their disorder may be a way for them to assert control over something when everything else feels chaotic to them, so do not focus the conversation solely on food issues but how they are feeling overall.

If your child has dramatically lost weight, it can be tempting to serve high calorie meals in an attempt to make them gain weight. However, 'forcing' them to eat can cause a great deal of stress and throw them back into their illness. It is often better to serve healthy and balanced meals to ease them back to normality.

Seek help from a GP. Your child may be unwilling to go but their eating habits could have put them in danger of various health risks. Furthermore, a GP can advise you in the best strategy to deal with your child and support them through this difficult illness. They will also be able to refer you to a therapist who can discover the root cause of your child's disorder and change the way in which they view food.

Eating disorders

In recent years, the media has thrust eating disorders into the spotlight. Yet despite this, many teenagers are still suffering without adequate help. Eating disorders affect an estimated 1.1 million people in the UK and teenagers are the most vulnerable group. Girls are significantly more likely to develop an eating disorder than boys. This does not mean boys are immune. Many teenage boys also succumb to the pressure to be thin.

There are three main types of eating disorder. Your teenager may not fall into one category but have a mixture of symptoms. This does not make their disorder any less serious.

- **Anorexia Nervosa** - Sufferer has an extreme fear of weight gain and will resort to a strict diet, fasting or compulsive exercising to lose weight. They may also have a distorted body image, viewing themselves as fat even though they are underweight.
- **Bulimia Nervosa** - Is similar to anorexia in that the sufferer has an extreme fear of weight gain but it also involves binge eating, usually on junk food and normally in secret. The sufferer will then feel intense guilt and purge by either self-induced vomiting or ingesting laxatives. This means they can still be a normal, or just below normal weight.
- **Binge eating disorder** - Sufferers will binge eat similar to those with bulimia, but will not purge to compensate for this. This results in weight gain.

Symptoms of an eating disorder

Sufferers of eating disorders will often go to extreme lengths to hide their illness. However, there are certain signs to help you spot eating disorders in adolescents.

- Being very strict about what is eaten, sticking to a very narrow set of foods
- Being inflexible about what is eaten
- Avoiding situations that may involve eating more than usual, such as meals out, weddings, etc
- Weight loss (in anorexia)
- Secretive behaviour
- Visiting the bathroom frequently, particularly after eating
- Exercising very frequently
- Becoming depressed and withdrawn
- Insomnia
- A distorted body image
- Skipping most meals
- Being preoccupied with food, calories, nutrition, and/or cooking
- Unusual eating habits (such as eating thousands of calories at one meal or skipping meals)
- Frequent weighing
- Dental problems
- Loss of hair or nail quality
- Acne
- Menstrual irregularities (in girls)

Teenage stress

Stress is an evolutionary response that pumps adrenaline into the body preparing it against a threat. Stress can give your teenager the motivation to study hard. However, too much stress can have a debilitating effect and leave them unable to concentrate. Teenagers are especially vulnerable to stress as their hormones are imbalanced at a time when they are juggling many activities and making potentially life-changing decisions such as choosing careers. Many simply find it too difficult to cope with the demands placed upon them.

Teenagers are facing increasing pressures at school. There is a growing emphasis on excelling in exams and going to university. Many teenagers feel 'failing' is simply not an option. On top of this teenagers are dealing with the physical changes to their bodies, family conflicts, friendship changes, relationship troubles and peer pressure, which for many teenagers results in anxiety and stress.

Spotting stress in adolescents

Stress varies in degree and can manifest itself psychologically and physically. If managed inadequately stress can cause your teenager to withdraw, become anxious and aggressive, develop a physical illness or resort to alcohol and drug abuse. It is therefore important to notice any signs that your teenager is stressed (*see right*).



Signs of stress in adolescents

- Becoming irritable and sensitive to criticism
- Sleeping problems - excessive sleepiness (hypersomnia) or inability to sleep (insomnia)
- Headaches
- Constipation or diarrhoea
- Loss or increase in appetite
- Alcohol or drug abuse
- Worrying excessively about physical appearance
- Sweating a lot
- Restlessness
- Sadness or depression

How to help a stressed teenager

The best thing you can do for a stressed teenager is to listen to them. Talking about their issues can reduce a great deal of their anxiety. Their problems may seem trivial to you, but do not dismiss them. Try and appreciate their importance to your child.

Encourage your teenager to eat well, exercise and get enough sleep. If their body is healthy they will feel more positive and be able to tackle stressful challenges.

Urge them to spend time on activities they enjoy. This will boost their confidence helping them believe they can overcome stressful events.

If you think your child is overstretched it might be time to intervene. A crammed schedule means that many activities are completed poorly. Discuss which ones are less important and then cut down the time spent on them. This will free up some time so your teenager can relax and enjoy being young.

If your teenager's stress is still a cause for concern, you may wish to consider therapy. A trained therapist will be able to identify the root of the stress and work with your teenager to develop strategies to manage it. They can help change the way your teenager views tasks, so instead of something feeling daunting and unachievable they view it as a challenge they can succeed at.

What can parents do about bullying?

Whether your child is the bully or the bullied person here are some things you can do to help the situation.

Parent of the bullied child

- Speak to the school to ensure they are aware of the situation and are putting anti-bullying measures in place.
- Reiterate to your child it is not their fault.
- Explain the bully is only picking on them because they are sad themselves.
- Use role-play to teach them how to ignore the bully and firmly say NO.
- Listen to your child talk about the events of the day.
- Build self-esteem by finding activities your child can be good at.
- Don't overprotect your child, as it may only make them feel more helpless.
- Get professional help if you think your child needs it.

Parent of the bully

- Find out why your child is acting like this. Bullying is often the result of frustration so communicate with them and find possible solutions.
- Explain what counts as bullying so they know the boundaries.
- Try and help them to understand how others feel. Ask questions like, "How would you feel if...?"
- Talk to their teachers regularly to see if the situation has improved.
- Set a good example. Talk kindly to others and solve problems calmly.
- Stress how unacceptable bullying is.
- Teach your child to negotiate to get what they want.
- Keep a record of the bullying incidents to see whether there is a trigger.
- Make sure you are positive about all their good, cooperative behaviour.
- Don't hesitate to get professional help if you think your child needs it.

Bullying

Bullying is the act of belittling someone repeatedly through harassment, physical harm, demeaning speech or efforts to ostracize them. There are three main forms of bullying.

- **Physical bullying** is when a bully attempts to physically dominate and instill fear in their victim (punching, kicking, etc). This is more common in boys.
- **Verbal bullying** is when the bully uses demeaning language to damage their victim's self image and humiliate them. This type is more common in girls.
- **Cyber bullying** occurs in the virtual world and is particularly vicious as nasty messages can be spread quickly using the internet and mobile phones and seen by many.

Who is affected by bullying?

Bullying can happen to anyone, from pre-school through to adulthood, although it is most common in mid-teens during the transition from primary to secondary school. Recent findings have shown a shocking 69% of school children report being bullied in the UK highlighting how big a problem it is for children.

In pre-school, bullies are likely to be acting out because they feel something is unfair or they are stressed. In these cases it is often best to address the bully's motivation rather than focus on disciplinary action. Children who lack confidence and self-esteem as a result of experiencing such bullying may need support to help them embrace future challenges and so to ensure they develop at a normal rate.

When your child moves on to primary school they are at a very sociable stage of development. Unfortunately, bullying is common at this stage. It can damage your child's sense of self and cause them to feel inadequate and inferior among their peers, which can continue on to later life unless it is addressed.

Entering secondary school is another difficult time. Children go from being the oldest and most knowledgeable in primary school to being the bottom of the food chain, making them an easy target for bullies. Add to this hormonal changes and pressures to do well at school and it is easy to see how children can find this a stressful time. Being bullied adds to this stress and the humiliation and loneliness can force many teenagers into depression (or even suicide), substance abuse and stunted social development – effects that can continue into adulthood.

Signs that a child is being bullied

- Becoming withdrawn and lacking confidence
- Coming home with unexplainable injuries
- Not wanting to go to school, or playing truant
- Becoming anxious and distressed
- Weight changes
- Decreasing school performance
- Having difficulty sleeping
- Beginning to bully other children or siblings
- Changing behaviour, such as wetting the bed
- Having possessions go missing

Parenting hints and tips

1 Live a healthy lifestyle

Good behaviour often starts from within. Ensure your child has a healthy diet and gets a minimum of one hour of exercise a day. This should reduce hyperactivity, frustration and stress and therefore increase good behaviour.

2 Set clear boundaries

Outline behaviour limits and ensure your child understands the consequences. If the child does not stick within the set limits, make sure you consistently follow through with punishment.

3 Encourage self-expression

Letting your child express themselves, for example, through their clothes will make them feel independent. However, if you do not want your child constantly hanging out in a fairy costume, you can plan a couple of outfits and let them choose one so they still feel independent.

4 Reward good behaviour

Give your child a star or sticker when they show good behaviour. Explain why they are being given the star and praise them for it. Giving them a visible reminder of their good behaviour will motivate them to continue to perform it.

5 Communicate with your child

Talk to them about their problems and show compassion. Starting this at an early age will increase the chances that your child will come to you when they are older and the problems more serious.

6 Explain your feelings

Explain clearly why their behaviour was bad and how it made you feel so they understand the reasons behind your feelings.

7 Be specific with praise

Praise should be geared towards specific actions. Rather than a general, "Good boy, you were really well behaved" be more specific by saying, "Well done, your were very good at sharing." If they know the exact behaviour they have been praised for they will be more likely to repeat it.

8 Believe in your child

Even when they are misbehaving, it is important to show them you believe they can behave better. Do not put them down.

9 Set a good example

"Do as I say, not as I do" does not work when it comes to children as they will often mimic your behaviour. Let your child see you cooperating with others, communicating efficiently and being considerate and they are likely to follow suit.

10 Look after yourself

Accept offers of help, or arrange with your partner for you to both have some 'me' time each week. If you are healthy and positive you will be a better parent.



Seeking professional help

Counsellors and psychologists can help children cope with stress and a range of emotional and behavioural issues, i.e. bullying, parental divorce, school stress and family transitions.

Sometimes a traumatic event triggers problems with behaviour, mood, sleep, appetite and academic or social functioning. Therapy can help your child come to terms with the event and alter their perceptions about it.

Alternatively, your child may suddenly change their behaviour, with no obvious cause. A counsellor or psychologist will be able to find the root of the problem and help your child to deal with it.

Behaviour therapy

Behaviour therapy aims to replace negative behaviours with positive ones by rewarding constructive behaviour and punishing destructive behaviour. The theory is that if we change our behaviour, we will change how we feel.

What does behaviour therapy involve?

The behavioural therapist will probably start by asking you and your child to make a diary of their activities during the week. This is then used to identify patterns of bad behaviour or triggers causing this behaviour. You can then all work together to develop new activities that increase your child's chances for positive experience.

Methods used within sessions will vary according to age or ability. The therapist might use role-play or give small rewards to encourage good behaviour. This should help strengthen their associations between constructive behaviour and positive outcomes, increasing the chance of them repeating the behaviour. The therapist will help you develop these skills so you can modify your child's behaviour outside of sessions.

How could behaviour therapy help my child?

Behaviour therapy has been particularly successful in children with disabilities or emotional/ behavioural problems. Such children often develop negative behaviour patterns due to frustration, anger, or cognitive impairments. Behaviour therapy teaches the child the benefits of good behaviour by reversing negative patterns of thinking and addressing bad habits. Successful behaviour therapy can increase your child's self esteem leading to improved performance at school, home or in social situations.

Whatever the cause, unsolved problems can impede a child's development or trigger long-lasting emotional states. Therapy can help get your child back on track ensuring they live as normal and happy a life as possible. Some common therapies are listed below, however, most therapists will use a mixture of approaches to closely match a child's individual needs.

Cognitive-behaviour therapy (CBT)

In CBT the emphasis is on how thoughts influence emotions and behaviour, rather than how behaviour affects thought (as in behaviour therapy). It adopts a structured and goal orientated approach to identify unhelpful thinking patterns and develop strategies to change these.

What does CBT involve?

CBT takes less time than other therapies as clients are required to apply the skills learned during sessions in the outside world. CBT usually involves the child – and sometimes other family members – meeting weekly with a therapist for about an hour. CBT typically lasts for between six and 20 sessions, during which the therapist and client(s) will discuss the child's current problems and develop strategies to enable change for the better.

A CBT therapist will work with you and your child to create an individual treatment plan to help them develop new problem solving skills. They might ask your child about negative assumptions or about their fears. CBT alters the way your child views and thinks about things, encouraging better behaviour and a more positive outlook.

CBT can be extremely effective if you and your child put in the effort during and between sessions. Without this you are unlikely to see significant results.

How could CBT help my child?

CBT can help with a variety of issues including OCD, phobias, depression and many more. Children with such issues can sometimes feel overwhelmed by their symptoms. A CBT therapist can help to break their feelings down into small manageable steps. Other problems cause children to feel inadequate or have poor self-image. In these cases CBT can guide them to reconsider their assumptions and improve their confidence.

CBT provides the tools to help you and your child understand each other better so your child can communicate better, rethink situations and solve problems.

Play therapy

Play therapy is a type of therapy that allows children to express their feelings and experiences through play. This means rather than explaining what is troubling them, your child could communicate it at their own level through the use of toys and games. This type of therapy is usually aimed at children between the ages of three and 11.

What does play therapy involve?

The play therapist will normally start by listening to any concerns about your child. They will ask about your past in order to get a better understanding of any stressful events your child has been through. They might ask to speak to your child's teachers so they can get a comprehensive assessment of your child's strengths as well as their weaknesses.

During the session, a variety of play materials will be placed in the room. The play therapist might structure the type of play in order to guide the child to deal with specific emotional or behavioural troubles. Alternatively, they might let the child play freely to encourage them to work towards their own solutions to problems and communicate their inner emotions.

How could play therapy help my child?

Play therapy can be used as a diagnosis tool. By examining the patterns of play and the objects your child chooses to play with, the therapist can understand the underlying motives to their behaviour. Alternatively, it can be used as a means to heal as a natural way for your child to express their inner conflict.

Play therapy allows a child to manipulate the world at a small scale. This can help them to feel more in control and understand their own feelings and thoughts, for example a child will often act out a traumatic event using their toys in order to make sense of it.

Play is an essential part of a child's healthy development. It can help them to manage relationships and conflicts. Effective play therapy therefore results in a reduction in stress and an increase in self-esteem that could greatly improve your child's behaviour and outlook.

Family therapy

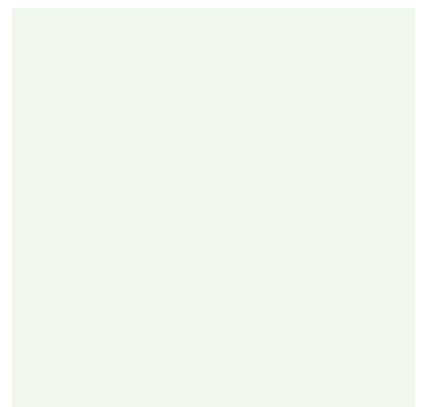
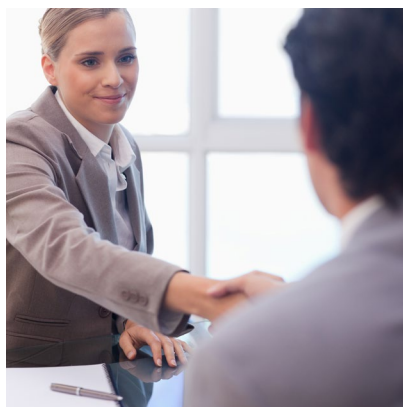
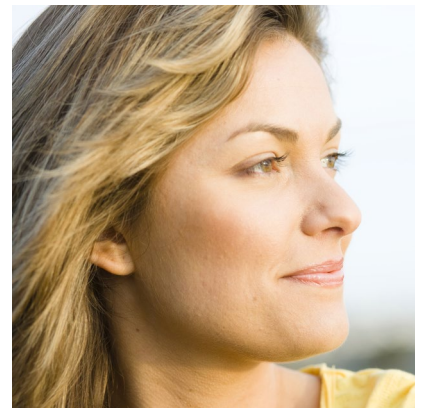
Family therapy is an approach that works with families and family members. It considers each person's role within the family and how that can affect behaviour. The theory suggests we cannot be understood in isolation, but rather are part of a unit that influences and defines us. This type of therapy can be especially beneficial to those who feel they have been damaged by family experiences.

What does family therapy involve?

Family therapists can work with individuals, couples, whole families or just with you and your child. You would typically require between six and 20 sessions, each lasting about an hour. A family therapist will examine the relationship between family members as well as the way you interact with one another. They are interested in the way you solve problems and maintain issues as a family rather than the actual causes of them. This type of therapy looks at outside influences on emotions and behaviour rather than focusing on an individual. It can help you understand how social circumstances and pressures can trap your family in negative systems and behaviours.

How could family therapy help my child?

Family therapy can help release you and your family from harmful patterns of behaviour. It is particularly successful in dealing with problems that are not being discussed, yet are affecting the whole family, such as eating disorders, bereavement, sibling rivalry, etc. Family therapy provides the skills so family members can help each other to grow as a family and prevent future problems. Perhaps the greatest benefit of family therapy is that it gives family members a safe place to discuss and express emotions, which can greatly ease your child's anxiety about their problems. The therapist ensures no individual is blamed for the problems, easing tension between family members. Successful family therapy results in a happier family that is capable of providing the support and encouragement to conquer any problems your child may be facing.



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