Understanding Bullying - Working Together to Keep Our Children Safe

Dear Parents and Carers,

As we approach **Anti-Bullying Week, beginning Monday 16th November,** we will be spending time with the children exploring what bullying is, how our words and actions affect others, and what we can all do to make sure our school is a kind, safe and happy place for everyone.

We know that when your child comes home upset about something that has happened at school, it can be worrying. We always want to hear about your concerns and work with you to support your child. We also feel it is helpful to share a common understanding of what bullying is, as not every disagreement, falling-out or unkind incident is bullying, although these situations still need to be taken seriously.

So, what is bullying?

Bullying is generally understood to involve:

- **Repeated behaviours** with an intent to hurt: the behaviour is intended to cause physical or emotional harm and most importantly it happens repeatedly over a period of time.

Bullying can be physical, verbal, emotional or take place online. It might include repeatedly hitting or threatening someone, name-calling, deliberately excluding a child to cause them upset, or repeatedly sending nasty messages.

What isn't necessarily bullying?

Children are still learning how to manage friendships, cope with disappointment, resolve disagreements and understand other people's feelings. As a result, there will inevitably be times when things go wrong.

For example:

- Two children have an argument or fall out over a game.
- Friends disagree about what to play or who to play with.
- A child says something unkind.
- Two children have a disagreement where neither is consistently targeting the other.
- Children fall out and as a result someone gets physically hurt.

We understand that as a parent, these situations can be upsetting and will often need adult support, guidance and follow-up to ensure they are resolved in the correct way. However, they should not be described as bullying unless there is a wider pattern of behaviour or other factors that meet the definition.

This does not mean that a one-off incident of unkindness is acceptable, or that the school will ever dismiss its importance or need for investigation and resolution. All children deserve to feel safe, valued and respected, and we will always address inappropriate behaviour even when it does not meet the definition of bullying.

How can we work together?

If your child tells you that they are having difficulties with another child, here are some helpful steps you can take:

Listen calmly. Give your child time to explain what happened and how they felt.

Ask open questions. For example, “Can you tell me what happened?” or “Has this happened before?”

Reassure them. Let them know that it is right to talk to a trusted adult when something is worrying them.

Contact the school. If you are concerned, please speak to a member of school staff (your child's class teacher or a senior member of staff at drop off or pick up) ideally face to face or over the phone, so that we can quickly understand the situation and decide on the best way to help. We understand that these situations will be upsetting but please do not approach a member of school staff in a cross, aggressive or threatening manner - remember, we are here to help you and your child but are not to blame for the incident or situation.

Work with us. We will listen, gather information, speak to the children involved, and take action based on what we find. We will always come back to you to inform you about what we have discovered and what actions we have taken as a result. Please rest assured that ALL incidents are recorded by school staff so that we can easily identify those instances where behaviours are repeated or become a pattern.

We kindly ask that parents avoid approaching other children directly or contacting other families to resolve incidents, as this can sometimes make a difficult situation more challenging.

What will we be doing during Anti-Bullying Week?

During the week beginning 16th November, we will be working with pupils in an age-appropriate way to help them understand bullying, recognise the difference between conflict and bullying, show kindness and respect, and know what to do if they or someone else is being repeatedly hurt or treated unfairly.

This year's theme is ' Break the Silence', as such extra emphasis will be placed on educating pupils on what bullying is, and together we will explore what children can do if they experience or witness bullying and how to ask for help.

Upper Key Stage 2, (Years 5 and 6), will also explore the **concept of 'banter'**. It is important for children to understand when a joke stops being funny and starts to hurt someone, and how this can cross into bullying. Children will be taught to recognise the difference between 'banter' and harmful comments, the impact of banter and pupils will be encouraged to speak up when something isn't right.

Our aim is to help children develop positive friendships, feel confident speaking up and understand that everyone has a part to play in creating a school where bullying is not tolerated.

Thank you for your continued support. By working together, we can help our children build healthy relationships, learn from difficulties and feel safe, supported and included at school.

Kind regards,

The Ashmead Team