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# BULLYING

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**Q**

**Can you tell me what to do about a bully in our street? I can't let my children out to play for more than 5 minutes because there is a horrible child who calls them names and throws things at them.**

He has even threatened to take their bikes from them.

The child's mother is a very rude woman who doesn't mix with anyone and has a foul tongue. There is a Dad but he comes and goes and sometimes is away for a couple of weeks at a time.

I'm furious that my children can't play in peace in front of their own house. We have talked about moving, but the Housing Executive says it could be a long time before we could transfer.

My nerves are wrecked with all the crying and carry-on and it's going to be like this all summer as we can't afford a holiday this year. What can I do?

**A**

This is a most difficult problem and one that there may be little you can do to make much difference. You have every right to feel angry that your children can't enjoy freedom without being harassed and bullied. It is unfair and unreasonable that they are subjected to this continual and annoying behaviour.

The bully's mother sounds intimidating making it improbable that you would feel like approaching her. The fact that she appears rude and that her husband's contact with the family is spasmodic may have a lot to do with why their child is a bully. Whatever the reasons, you are on the receiving end.

You could try to befriend the bully. This seemingly unlikely suggestion can be effective, even for a short while. You probably don't feel like being pleasant to a child who has caused your own children so much hurt, but if the bully is unhappy himself he might respond to some friendliness.

If that doesn't work, the only choice you are left with is to give your children specific instructions to deal with the annoyances. Agree with them that they ignore taunts, try to play with as many children as possible and that they stay within certain limits near the house.

If they are upset, they come in straight away before the bully has a chance to deflate them further. Boost their confidence in whatever ways you can and try to help them keep it in perspective. Balance the sympathy with helping them to refocus on alternative activities. It would be interesting to hear from other parents who have found ways to deal satisfactorily with such neighbourhood bullying.

