

Eczema and Bullying

This fact sheet is intended for carers of children with eczema, preferably with their child alongside, and is in two parts:

1. Practical tips on how to avoid bullying situations because of eczema
2. What to do about bullying if it occurs

One in five children in the UK has eczema. Recent studies show that it is on the increase, especially in younger children. That means there are likely to be, on average, six children in a class of 30 who will have experience of eczema. Some will have mild eczema and some will have a more severe form. The majority of children with eczema will be pre-secondary school.

In a survey of National Eczema Society members, one in five mums said their kids have been bullied at school because of their eczema. If the eczema is on visible parts of the body such as the face and hands, this immediately makes a child look different from their peers. But even when hidden by clothing, eczema can still make its presence known because of the constant itch associated with eczema and the need for a child to apply creams. Children have to avoid things that can trigger a flare of eczema such as certain foods which cause irritation to their skin through touch or when they are eaten. They may not be able to take part in school normal activities such as Physical Education and swimming as sweating and chlorine can irritate the skin, and because your child may be embarrassed about the other children seeing their inflamed, scratched and damaged skin.

Practical tips to avoid bullying situations

Most children want to be like their peers – join in activities, attend parties and do the things that “everyone else” does. Carers of children with eczema can help their child fit in by good preparation:

a) Self-esteem:

Give your child a sense of inner worth which will translate into self-confidence. Educating your child about eczema and how common it is can help, so that they can confidently tell other children about eczema, reassuring them that eczema is not catching (infectious). There are lots of inspirational sayings which, if they connect with the child, can give that child something to help shape a positive attitude towards life. The team at Nottingham have created some stories on the web which can be downloaded and

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personalized for your child <https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/research/groups/cebd/resources/psychology-and-eczema.aspx>.

Research has shown that these stories can help reduce stigma and help adult-child communication about eczema

Dragon in My Skin :

<https://www.bcu.ac.uk/health-sciences/research/centre-for-social-care-health-and-related-research/research-projects/eczema-mindlines/the-dragon-in-my-skin>.

Eczema Outreach Support also has further wellbeing resources: <https://eos.org.uk/wellbeing-resources-for-children-and-young-people/>

b) School:

Think about educating the teachers and students about the condition, perhaps with the help of the child and the school nurse.

- Eczema Outreach Support have a variety of resources and which can be downloaded: <https://eos.org.uk/we-can-support-you/eczema-at-school/>.
- Birmingham City School of Health Sciences have also developed a resource for teachers: <https://bcuassets.blob.core.windows.net/docs/tdims-workpack-v2-long-132693393982395364.pdf>

If food allergies play a part in your child's eczema, there is some useful information here: Allergy UK's School information sheet - <https://www.allergyuk.org/?s=School> Discuss with the school the best way to care for your child during activities. This may be through avoidance but it may simply be a case of your child needing a little help protecting the skin with emollient before at after the activity, or by use of antihistamines, as appropriate.

In very severe cases of eczema you may need to explore how to get your child extra support in the classroom <https://www.gov.uk/children-with-special-educational-needs>

c) Social occasions:

Pre-planning can help your child feel at ease in social situations and minimise opportunities for them to experience social exclusion.

Parties: if your child has a food allergy component to their eczema, speak with the host family and provide your child with suitable equivalent party food in a lunch box.

Sleepovers can be particularly stressful for a child with eczema. Your child can become over-tired (which can make eczema worse). There may be pets present (even if your own home has a pet, research has shown that unfamiliar pets may present a greater challenge to those with eczema). Your child may be embarrassed if their eczema bleeds on their bedding, if they have to change in front of a friend or ask for help in applying their creams. Be aware of these issues and talk them through with your child.

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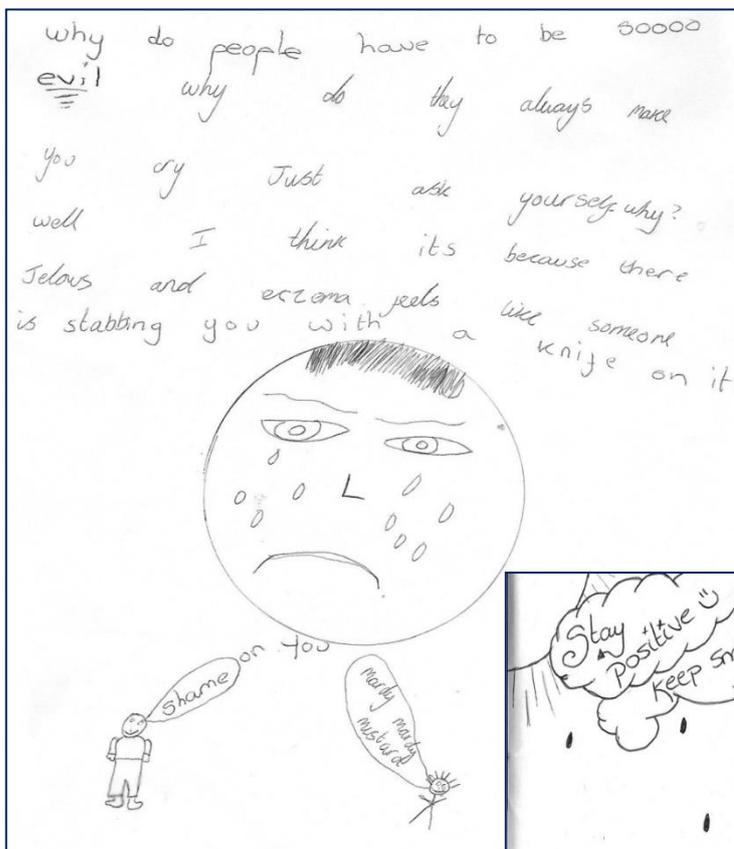
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d) On-line

Whilst the skin appearance may not be necessarily be visible online, cyberbullying, sadly, can occur as unauthorised images, videos or cruel comments on the victims social media profile. It is estimated that around 16% of children experience cyberbullying. Privacy settings may help.

What to do about bullying



Here are some drawings relating to bullying. The first shows what being bullied feels like to a 12 year old child with eczema and the second is an 18 year old's advice to those who are bullied. Here is a comment from an adult posted on Twitter that shows that the memories of being bullied stay with us always "My nickname at primary school was porridge oats cos my eczema always flaked off like (cruel eh?)"

Diagram: A 12 year old's experiences of eczema

Below is an 18 year old's illustrated advice to those who are bullied



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There are times that a child still experience bullying despite the above strategies. Inevitably some children will sadly experience bullying. Stress can aggravate skin conditions such as eczema. The sooner bullying can be addressed, the better.

- a) If the bullying is at school, get the teachers involved. By law, all state (not private) schools must have a behaviour policy in place that includes measures to prevent all forms of bullying among pupils. This policy is decided by the school. All teachers, pupils and parents must be told what it is. See <https://www.gov.uk/bullying-at-school>.
- b) Contact an anti-bullying organisation for advice.
- c) Trust the instincts of you and your child. Perhaps the child could laugh off ignorant comments, showing the bullies that they won't get the reaction that they are looking for.
- d) A new set of friends could provide a supportive network.
- e) Encourage your child to express their feelings, perhaps in drawing like the ones above. If it seems appropriate, and the child agrees, we would like to display any such drawing on our website, to help greater understanding of the problem of bullying a child who has eczema.
- f) Cyber bullying: Please find further advice of how to prevent and stop Cyberbullying from the following links: <https://www.common sense media.org/cyberbullying>
Tips to Help Stop Cyberbullying :
<https://connectsafely.org/tips-to-help-stop-cyberbullying/>
- g) Bullying due to a disability is a hate crime <https://anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk/tools-information/all-about-bullying/bullying-and-law/hate-crime-and-bullying>

Further information

The organisations below can provide more information and support for people with atopic eczema on how to cope with bullying.

National Eczema Society, 0800 0891122 <https://eczema.org/>

NSPCC <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/>

Eczema Outreach Support: <https://eos.org.uk/get-support/>

Changing Faces, 0845 4500 275 <https://www.changingfaces.org.uk/>

ChildLine 0800 11 11 <https://www.childline.org.uk/>

UK Government information <https://www.gov.uk/bullying-at-school>

A story to help introduce the concept of sharing to little ones <https://fliphtml5.com/sqjgk/jjpw/basic/>

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