The Blossom Guide to Getting on and Falling out

What is Bullying?

There are several key characteristics to bullying that set it apart from someone just being unkind. Bullying is defined as unwanted aggressive behaviour among school aged children that involves a real or perceived power imbalance*.
* Source, www.stopbullying.gov

Children who are bullied may have serious lasting problems, but it's worth remembering that the children who bully may also suffer lasting damage. That's not to excuse them, but just to be mindful that everyone involved is damaged by bullying and it is a complex issue.
This definition of bullying is taken from the government website www.stopbullying.gov

There are three types of bullying:

Verbal bullying is saying or writing mean things. e.g:
Teasing
Name-calling
Inappropriate sexual comments
Taunting
Threatening to cause harm

Social bullying, sometimes referred to as relational bullying, involves hurting someone's reputation or relationships. e.g:
Leaving someone out on purpose
Telling other children not to be friends with someone
Spreading rumours about someone
Embarrassing someone in public

Physical bullying involves hurting a person's body or possessions.e.g:
Hitting/kicking/pinching
Spitting
Tripping/pushing
Taking or breaking someone's things
Making mean or rude hand gestures

Bullying is an emotional word and can evoke real reactions in us as adults, particularly if we were bullied ourselves as children. It's also something that, if we have experienced, we would never ever want our child to go through the same thing. It's important, though, that we don't project our own worries and fears onto what happens with our children and that we keep an objective viewpoint. For this reason it's important to know exactly what bullying is and also to be careful when talking to children about incidents that happen to them so that we make sure we aren't making them anxious or projecting our own fears onto what happened.
So what **isn't** bullying? Have a look at these and a think. What would you think if your child complained of someone doing these things. Are they bullying?

Disagreeing with someone.
Having an argument
Saying you don't want to play someone's game.
Snatching toys or not sharing
Not inviting someone to your birthday party
Hiding from someone
calling someone by a nickname
laughing at someone
not wanting to sit next to someone
Getting others to be mean to someone

It's tricky, isn't it! In most of these cases, it depends on the context, the frequency, and the intention. Make sure that you ask your child about how often these things have happened, about where and when and why they happened. In the end, also be prepared for the other side of the story to be quite a surprise and for the possibility that your child might be giving as good as they get!

Getting On And Falling Out

Falling out and making up again is part of learning social skills It's really hard to hear that your child has had a bad day and often there are children who we wish we could have a stern word with on behalf of your child, but try not to react straight away. What I mean is try not to go into a panic that your child is being bullied. Bullying is intentional and persistent. Disagreements happen - they are awful, but tend to be short lived and are not the same as bullying.

Naturally, you must acknowledge their worries and their interpretation of an event - if they are talking to you about it, then, to them, it's a huge deal.

You can say:

I can see something doesn't feel good for you. Do you think you can tell me about it?

or

I'm really sorry that you had an argument with Billy. I can see that you are still feeling sad. Do you want to tell me what happened?

The most important thing is that you don't ask a range of questions that leave you with the wrong impression and which feed your fears or light a fire under an argument that wasn't there.... E.g. instead of 'Who did you play with today?' which prompts the answer 'No one', you could say 'What was the best thing about today?' 'What did (name of their friend) do at playtime?' 'What was the best game you played?'

Check the Blossom Guide to Awareness Days guide for when Anti-Bullying week is - they will talk about bullying in school then and your child may well talk to you about bullying.

Any problems that your child talks about, they are viewing them from a child's perspective and are looking to you to help them make sense of it. If someone is mean to you when you are 4, it can trigger huge feelings. We get more resilient in life by learning to rationalise people's behaviour and see things from their viewpoint.

Keep questioning as neutral as you can so that your child gets a balanced viewpoint, but also make sure they know that you are on their side and will help them sort it out.

If you can help your child to reflect on the causes of behaviour, and their own actions, you will be empowering them for future events and teaching strategies for resilience. It's important to acknowledge their worries or upsets, but you can help them by talking things through with your child and helping them to understand the actions of others. Over time they will be able to do this for themselves and will be able to self soothe, regulate their own emotions, and make peace - What a great life skill!