

What to Do if Your Child is Being Bullied

What is bullying?

Bullying among children is aggressive behavior that is intentional and that involves an imbalance of power or strength. A child who is being bullied has a hard time defending himself or herself. Usually, bullying is repeated over time. Bullying can take many forms, such as hitting or punching (physical bullying); teasing or name-calling (verbal bullying); intimidation using gestures or social exclusion (nonverbal bullying or emotional bullying); and sending insulting messages by phone or computer e-mail (cyberbullying).

Effects of bullying

Bullying can have serious consequences. Children and youth who are bullied are more likely than other children to

- Be depressed, lonely, anxious;
- Have low self-esteem;
- Be absent from school;
- Feel sick; and
- Think about suicide.

Reporting bullying to parents

Children frequently do not tell their parents that they are being bullied because they are embarrassed, ashamed, frightened of the children who are bullying them, or afraid of being seen as a “tattler.” If your child tells you about being bullied, it has taken a lot of courage to do so. Your child needs your help to stop the bullying.

What to do if your child is being bullied

1. First, focus on your child. Be supportive and gather information about the bullying.

- Never tell your child to ignore the bullying. What the child may “hear” is that you are going to ignore it. If the child were able to simply ignore it, he or she likely would not have told you about it. Often, trying to ignore bullying allows it to become more serious.
- Don’t blame the child who is being bullied. Don’t assume that your child provoked the aggressor.

- Listen carefully to what your child tells you about the bullying. Ask him or her to describe who was involved and how and where each bullying episode happened.
- Learn as much as you can about the bullying tactics used, and when and where the bullying happened. Can your child name other children or adults who may have witnessed the bullying?
- Empathize with your child. Tell him/her that bullying is wrong, not their fault, and that you are glad he or she had the courage to tell you about it. Ask your child what he or she thinks can be done to help. Assure him or her that you will think about what needs to be done and you will let him or her know what you are going to do.
- If you disagree with how your child handled the bullying situation, don’t criticize him or her.
- Do not encourage physical retaliation (“Just hit them back”) as a solution. Hitting another student is not likely to end the problem, and it could get your child suspended or expelled or escalate the situation.
- Check your emotions. A parent’s protective instincts stir strong emotions. Although it is difficult, a parent is wise to step back and consider the next steps carefully.

2. Contact your child’s teacher or principal.

- Parents are often reluctant to report bullying to school officials, but bullying may not stop without the help of adults.
- Keep your emotions in check. Give factual information about your child’s experience of being bullied including who, what, when, where, and how.
- Emphasize that you want to work with the staff at school to find a solution to stop the bullying, for the sake of your child as well as other students.
- Do not contact the parents of the student(s) who bullied your child. This is usually a parent’s first response, but sometimes it makes matters worse. School officials should contact the parents of the child or children who did the bullying.
- Talk regularly with your child and with school staff to see whether the bullying has stopped. If the bullying persists, contact school authorities again.

3. Help your child become more resilient to bullying.

- Help to develop talents or positive attributes of your child. Suggest and facilitate music, athletics, and art activities. Doing so may help your child be more confident among his or her peers.
- Encourage your child to make contact with friendly students in his or her class. Your child's teacher may be able to suggest students with whom your child can make friends, spend time, or collaborate on work.
- Help your child meet new friends outside of the school environment. A new environment can provide a "fresh start" for a child who has been bullied repeatedly.
- Teach your child safety strategies. Teach him or her how to seek help from an adult when feeling threatened by a bully. Talk about whom he or she should go to for help and role-play what he or

she should say. Assure your child that reporting bullying is not the same as tattling.

- Ask yourself if your child is being bullied because of a learning difficulty or a lack of social skills? If your child is hyperactive, impulsive, or overly talkative, the child who bullies may be reacting out of annoyance. This doesn't make the bullying right, but it may help to explain why your child is being bullied. If your child easily irritates people, seek help from a counselor so that your child can better learn the informal social rules of his or her peer group.
- Home is where the heart is. Make sure your child has a safe and loving home environment where he or she can take shelter, physically and emotionally. Always maintain open lines of communication with your child.

For more information, visit: www.stopbullying.gov

References

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