

Bullying, It's Not Okay

When Your Child is the Victim, the Bully, or a Bystander

What is Bullying?

Bullying is when one child or a group of children repeatedly picks on another child—often one who is seen as weaker and more vulnerable. Bullying can be about any real or imagined difference a child might have. Bullying is different from fighting and teasing. What makes it different is the way the bully repeatedly shows power over the other child. Bullies try to control other children by using scare tactics. Being controlled and repeatedly picked on can make your child a victim.

- Girls, as well as boys, can be involved in bullying. The child will pick on other children by teasing, threatening, or attacking them repeatedly. Some will also exclude their victims from activities or start rumors about them.
- Bullying often happens at school—in the halls, at lunch, while on the playground—specially when no adult is supervising. It can also occur traveling to and from school or in the neighborhood.
- Bullies often pick on children who act very emotional or give in because it makes the bullies feel powerful.
- To stop bullying, adults must step in and take a stand against it. Children need and want the help of trusted adults in dealing with bullying. Don't wait until children are teens. Intervening at an early age prevents more severe bullying later on.

Talk to your kids about bullying even if you don't think they are victims, bullies or bystanders. Remember, simply by asking your children about bullying, you are protecting them. Ask how things are going at school. Ask what they think of the other kids in their classes. Ask if anyone gets picked on or bullied. Be aware that some kids who are bullied will fear going to school or develop symptoms of asthma, stomach pains, or other illnesses.

When Your Child Is The Victim

- Work with your child on how to stay safe. Do not encourage your child to fight back because a situation can easily escalate and become dangerous.
- Teach your child how to look the bully in the eye, stand tall, use a firm voice, and stay calm in difficult situations. Practice this at home.
- Encourage your child to become friends with other children. Your child can join adult-supervised groups in and out of school. Have your child's friends come over to your house. Children who are loners are more likely to get picked on.
- Encourage your child to develop new abilities and interpersonal skills, through such activities as team sports, music groups, and social clubs. When children feel good about how they relate to others, they feel better about themselves and are less likely to be picked on.
- Talk about what you can say—or do—if this happens again. Just telling your child to do things such as standing firm or walking away is not enough. For many victims, these skills do not come naturally. It is like learning a new language.
- They need lots of practice. Practice with your child so that in the heat of the moment your child can use these skills.
- Teach your child when and how to ask for help. Your child should not be afraid to ask and adult for help when bullying.
- Make sure an adult who knows about the bullying can watch out for your child's safety and well-being when you cannot be there.
- Talk with the school principal or guidance counselor, as well as the teachers. Alert them to the problems you see, and work with them on solutions. When school officials know about bullying, they can help stop it.

- Write down and report all bullying. By knowing when and where the bullying occurs, you and your child can better plan what to do if it happens again.

When Your Child Is The Bully

When you see or hear that your child is bullying others—take it seriously. In the long run, bullies continue to have problems, and the problems often get worse, even into adulthood. Now is the time when you can change your child's behavior.

- Be a positive role model. Show children how they can get what they want without teasing, threatening, or attacking. Children can learn to treat others with respect. Children learn by watching and by what happens to them.
- Help your child understand how bullying hurts other children. Give real examples of the good and bad results of their actions.
- Set firm and consistent limits on your child's aggressive behavior. Tell your child bullying is never acceptable.
- Use effective, non-physical discipline, such as loss of privileges. When your child needs discipline, explain why the behavior was wrong and how it can be changed.
- Help your child develop new and constructive strategies for getting what they want.
- Supervise children and help them develop their skills and interests. Children with too much time on their hands are more likely to find themselves in violent or dangerous situations.
- Reinforce school rules against bullying. Work with school staff to show you take the behavior seriously.
- Develop practical solutions with the school principal, teachers, and parents of the children your child has bullied.

When Your Child Is A Bystander

- Teach your child how to help without getting hurt. Your child might say, "Cool it! This isn't going to solve anything."
- Tell your child not to cheer on or even quietly watch a conflict—this only encourages the bully who is trying to be the center of attention.
- Encourage your child to tell a trusted adult about the bullying. Talking to an adult is not 'tattling'—it is an act of courage, strength and safety. Suggest going with a friend to make it easier.
- Help your child support others who tend to be victims. Teach your child to try to include these children in activities.

Remember:

Bullying Affects All Children—Whether they are victims, bullies, or bystanders. Concerned and involved principals, teachers, and especially parents can reduce bullying in schools and neighborhoods.

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