



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 through gestures or social exclusion (nonverbal bullying or emotional bullying); and sending insulting messages by phone or computer email (cyber bullying).

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
- 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 did something to provoke the bullying. Don't say, “What did you do to aggravate the other child?”
- Listen carefully to what your child tells you about the bullying. Ask him/her to describe who was involved and how and where each bullying episode happened.
- Learn as much as you can about the bullying tactics being used, 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/she had the courage to tell you about it. Ask your child what he/she thinks can be done to help. Assure him/her that you will think about what needs to be done and you will let him/her know what you are going to do.
- If you disagree with how your child handled the bullying situation, don't criticize him/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 and/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—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.
 - Expect the bullying to stop. Talk regularly with your child and with school staff to see if the bullying has stopped. If the bullying persists, contact school authorities again.
- 3. Help your child to 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/her peers.
 - Encourage your child to make contact with friendly students in his 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/her how to seek help from an adult when he/she feels threatened by a bully. Talk about whom he/she should go to for help and role play what he/she should say. Assure your child that reporting bullying is not the same as tattling.
 - Ask yourself: Is my child 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/her peer group.
 - Home is where the heart is. Make sure your child has a safe and loving home environment where he/she can take shelter, physically and emotionally. Always keep the lines of communication with your child open.

References

Olweus, D. (1993). *Bullying At school: What we know and what we can do*. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell.

Snyder, J. M. (February, 2003) *What Parents Can Do About Childhood Bullying*. Schwab Learning Center, (www.schwablearning.org) Charles and Helen Schwab Foundation. <http://www.schwablearning.org/articles.asp?r=697>

What Parents Should Know about Bullying (2002). Prevention Child Abuse America Publication. South Deerfield, MA. (1-800-835-2671).