

Bullying—Not Just Kids Being Kids

In the wholesome black-and-white TV shows of the 1950s, the widespread understanding about bullies was that the only solution was to punch them in the nose. Times have changed, and while bullying among children at school has never been a laughing matter, today it is more serious than ever. Bullying has evolved with communication technology, and in some cases has become more violent and physically dangerous due to the influence of movies, television, and video games. The hectic lifestyles of modern families means that parents easily become disconnected from the school lives of their children, leaving them with nowhere to turn for help when faced with bullying. In order to prevent the serious harm that bullying causes, it is critical for parents to understand the nature of the problem and how they can help their kids conquer it.

Definition of Bullying

It's not bullying for a kid to make a funny comment about the way their friend's hair is sticking up. It is bullying to follow them around school, shouting derogatory and hurtful remarks to them. It's important to help your child develop a "thick skin," and be able to take a joke once in a while. Children who take themselves too seriously imagine that everyone around them is bullying them, and this attitude encourages actual bullies to single them out as an easy target. Help your child recognize that bullying consists of hurtful, unkind, mean-spirited words or actions. Often it is direct, but sometimes it is indirect, in the form of spreading rumors or passing on private information.

RESOURCES

Love Our Children USA:

www.stompoutbullying.com

Pacer's National Bullying Prevention Center:

www.pacer.org/bullying

U.S. Health & Human Services:

www.stopbullying.gov

>INFOCUS

A PARENT'S GUIDE: *bullying and your child*



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By being attentive to your child and keeping the lines of communication open, you can minimize bullying's negative effects.



Communication

"Don't be a tattletale." "Can't you take a joke?" "If you tell anyone, I'll kill you." Statements like these make children hesitate to tell their parents or school authorities about bullying. Bypass this problem by looking for the tell-tale signs of bullying and informing your child that no one is allowed to stand between you and them. A child who is enduring bullying at school is typically quiet, anxious, stressed, and pensive. They might avoid talking about their day at school and change the subject. They may come up with reasons to stay home from school. When these signals appear, show your child that you have a good idea of what is going on.

Make sure your child knows that they are not alone. Everyone has dealt with bullying at one time or another. The problem is not your child's; it's the bully's. Nobody at school is allowed to tell them not to talk to their parents. By giving children this message, you make it easier for them to feel safe and confident in telling you about the problem.

Preparing Your Child

Once your child is ready for you to help them, you might feel more helpless than before. What can you say? What are some tried-and-true pieces of advice from educational and developmental experts?

If your child is being bullied, advise them to:

- **Control your temper.** Bullying thrives on reaction. No matter how hurtful the statements are, if a bully is unable to get a response, eventually they will leave you alone.
- **Avoid bad situations.** Keep any expensive or personally valuable items hidden away; walk with good friends whenever possible; and reduce your contact with kids who are known bullies.
- **Talk to adults.** No matter what a bully says, it is always right to tell a teacher, counselor, or any other adult what is going on.



• **Don't fight back.** It is essential to keep violence out of the equation. If your child resorts to physical attacks, they could be the one facing discipline, not to mention injury.

• **Don't give in to demands.** Giving a bully your lunch money won't end the problem. If a bully finds that they can easily get anything they want from you, they will continue to bother you. You might need to give in once to get out of the situation, but your very next step should be to tell an adult what happened.

Taking Action

It might become necessary for you, as the parent, to step into the situation yourself. Know what your child's school's policies are and follow the procedures for notifying officials of bullying. Don't barge into someone's office, losing your temper and demanding action immediately. School authorities are well aware of how best to address bullying problems, and usually all you need to do is inform them of the situation. Feel free to check up on the situation later, but allow the school to handle it. Experts agree that going directly to the bully's parents is a poor idea, since it can lead to further conflict and additional trouble for your child.

Parenting a Bully

You may receive the unpleasant news from a school official that another child has complained of bullying from your child. Your response needs to be authoritative yet understanding. If your child is bullying others at school, your responsibility is to make them stop. However, you should do so by teaching them why their actions are wrong; how their actions are hurting those around them and driving their friends away; and how their interactions with others in the future will be hindered by their bullying. Try to find out what influences have played a part in developing bullying behavior, and counter them with positive examples.



Cyber-Bullying

Instant messaging, blogging, and social media have made it easier for the "rumor mill" to cause devastating hurt to children and adults alike. If your child is suffering from cyber-bullying, document the activity by downloading hurtful pictures, saving posts, emails and texts, and bring the information to the attention of school authorities. Numerous tragic suicides in recent years have illustrated just how destructive cyber-bullying can be to a young person's state of mind. Don't ignore it.

Passive/Active Bystanders

A bully succeeds when their behavior is witnessed. A **passive bystander** is a witness to wrong doing who does not intervene in a positive way. An **active bystander** is a witness who takes a stance against wrong doing. Stress to your children that being a passive bystander to bullying is not okay, and encourage them to become an active one. Without support from passive bystanders, a bully loses their power.