

Bullying



Parents discover their child has been asking the cafeteria for free lunch ... even though they've sent in lunch money every day. It turns out that another student has been threatening the child to hand over the money—or get beaten up.

A student has been asking to stay home from school on days when there's P.E. The parents learn that classmates have been hiding their child's clothes and laughing.

These children—and thousands of others—are the targets of bullying. The good news is that when families and schools work together to respond quickly and consistently to bullying, they can stop the behavior over time.

Here's what you need to know about the tough issue of bullying.

QuickTips

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What Is Bullying?

When a child with more power (physical, social, etc.) repeatedly harasses a student with less power, that's bullying. It can be physical (pushing, hitting) or verbal (teasing, threatening). There's also social bullying, which includes intentionally ignoring or excluding others. And bullying can happen in person or online (cyberbullying).

Bullying can have serious, long-term emotional effects. It is not simply "kids being kids." Bullying affects all aspects of children's lives, including their ability to learn.

Students who bully can target just about anybody for a number of reasons, but kids at risk of being bullied tend to be those who are seen as different from or weaker than their peers.

How Do I Know if My Child Is Being Bullied?

Children are often reluctant to talk to parents about being bullied. They think complaining about bullying will make them look weak or invite more harassment.

If you suspect your child is being bullied:

- **Observe your child.** Students who are bullied often start avoiding school. Their grades may drop. They may withdraw from activities. The stress may cause frequent stomachaches and headaches, difficulty sleeping—or even panic attacks. Their self-esteem may plummet, or they may take out their frustration on others.
- **Talk and listen.** Encourage your child to tell you about what goes on in school or at other activities. Ask about the trip to and from school.

Facts About Bullying:

- **Cyberbullying can be as harmful as in-person bullying.** And unlike other forms of bullying, it doesn't end when students leave school—it can happen any time a child is online.

- **Children who bully others do so for different reasons.** They may believe it will make them more popular. Or they might turn to bullying because they are bullied by their peers or abused at home.

- **Bullying is harmful to everyone involved.** Students who are bullied are more likely to struggle academically and to experience depression and anxiety. And children who bully are more likely to engage in violent behavior and have criminal convictions as adults.

- **Acts of bullying are often carried out by more than one child.** These children may be part of a group where intimidating others establishes group identity, dominance and status. Students who bully often depend on bystanders who assist or reinforce the bullying.

What if My Child Is a Target of Bullying?

Some parents tell their children to strike back if they are bullied. That usually creates more problems than it solves. Here are some better solutions:

- **Provide an emotional refuge.** Offer comfort if your child cries. Explain that your child is not to blame and that no one should have to put up with bullying. Keep your child involved in finding a solution, but make sure you are taking action.
- **Discuss with your child** how to avoid situations in which bullying often occurs. It might be possible to take a different route or to stay with a group.
- **Give your child some ways to respond** to bullying. Together, practice ways to stand up for yourself without losing your temper. Your child might:
 - Try to ignore the bullying.
 - Turn and walk away.
 - Try not to show emotion.
- **Let the school know.** Keep a record of the times your child is bullied. Save harassing emails, text messages, etc. Make sure school officials know about these incidents at once.



- **Decide with school officials** whether to contact law enforcement authorities.
- **Find a new activity** that will allow your child to focus on talents and interests. Your child will get to spend time with people who aren't connected to the bullying.

What if My Child Witnesses Bullying?

Peers often know that a child is being bullied before any adults do. Tell your child that witnesses need to act. Ignoring the problem won't make it go away and may lead the children who bully to think that bystanders support the behavior. Share these bystander Dos and Don'ts with your child:

Dos:

- **Offer an escape.** Invite the bullied child to play or ask them to walk away with you.
- **Persuade** the bullied child to tell an adult. Or offer to tell an adult yourself.

Don'ts:

- **Don't use violence.** You may get hurt or even be blamed for bullying, too.
- **Don't try to handle** the situation by yourself. Talk to a responsible adult.

What Should I Do if My Child Is Involved in Bullying?

If you suspect your child is bullying others, take the following action right away:

- **Talk with your child** about the behavior you expect. Be a role model. Make it clear that your family does not tolerate behavior that hurts other people physically or emotionally.
- **Avoid physical punishment.** There is evidence that physical punishment may make children more aggressive and encourage bullying. Instead try limiting privileges.
- **Remember, the school is ready to help.** Contact your child's teacher and school counselor to discuss your concerns. If your child is participating in bullying, you can work together to put an end to the behavior.



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