

How can you help your child address bullying?



What is bullying?

Bullying among children is intentional, aggressive behavior that involves an imbalance of power or strength. A child who is being bullied may have trouble 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);
- sending insulting messages by phone or online (cyberbullying).

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 harming themselves.

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” or “snitch.” 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.

How can I support my child if he or she is bullied at school?

- Do not tell your child to ignore the bullying. 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.
- Do not blame the child who is being bullied. Do not assume that your child did something to provoke the bullying. Questions such as “What did you do to aggravate the other child?” usually are not helpful.
- 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.
- Before giving advice, ask your child what she has already tried to resolve the problem. Praise her for all the things she has tried. Encourage him to keep telling you and other adults. Help him to think about what has worked—or what might work.
- Talk with your child’s teacher, principal, or counselor and ask them to help your child be safe. Their intervention may

include consequences for the student who bullies, increased supervision, and helping your child make more friends if she is isolated. But remember: By federal law, administrators cannot tell you about disciplinary actions taken against another child—even when your child is a victim.

- Do not encourage physical retaliation (“Just hit them back”) as a solution. Hitting another student is likely to further escalate the problem, and it could get your child suspended or expelled.
- Do not contact the parents of the student(s) who bullied your child. Sometimes it can make matters worse.
- If your child is isolated, help him make connections through activities, hobbies, or clubs. Having new, positive relationships will help your child see the cruel behavior as a choice made by those who bullied him, rather than as something he caused.

What if my child is in an abusive friendship?

- Both girls and boys sometimes get into friendships with someone who is a friend one day and mean the next; who talks behind their backs; and who makes them feel that this mean behavior is somehow their fault. The best way for young people to protect themselves from this hurt is to move on to other friendships, knowing that a real friend doesn’t hurt you.
- 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. Seek help from a counselor so that your child can better learn the informal social rules of his or her peer group.

How can I encourage my child to speak up about bullying that he or she sees?

- Encourage your child to join with others in telling adults when they see bullying and in reaching out in friendship to isolated youth. Praise your child when she does these things. Remind her that she has the power to help.
- Assure your child that reporting bullying is not the same as tattling or snitching. Teach him how to seek help from an adult when feeling threatened by a bully. Talk about whom he should go to for help and role-play what he should say.

bostonpublicschools.org/antibullying

Anti-bullying Hotline:

📞 617-534-5050

SOURCES:

www.stopbullyingnow.hrsa.gov, website of the U. S. Dept. of Health & Human Services | Health Resources & Services Administration
www.MARCcenter.org, website of the Massachusetts Aggression Reduction Center at Bridgewater State College