

How to Address Bullying

If your child has had problems with bullying or aggressive behavior or has been the victim of a bully, the following suggestions may be helpful.

IF YOUR CHILD HAS BULLIED OTHERS

- If you see your child bullying someone, put a stop to the behavior immediately, and have your child practice a more appropriate behavior instead. For example, if your child pushes his sister away from a toy so that he can play with it, have him practice several times asking for and receiving the toy.
- If your child has been bullying someone, and you do not find out until later, find a way that she can “make amends” (e.g., giving back something that was taken from another child with an apology).
- Try to supervise situations in which bullying may occur. If you cannot be present, try to find someone who can. If no one is available, consider not letting your child participate in that situation.
- Be aware of your own behavior, modeling for your child how you would like him to treat others.
- Avoid the use of physical punishment (e.g., spanking), which may give your child the message that physical aggression is OK. Instead, use removal of privileges, work tasks at home, or helping younger children at home or in the neighborhood as consequences for bullying behavior.
- Let your child’s school psychologist, teacher, or guidance counselor know about your concerns, and ask for their assistance in addressing the problem.
- Be sure that you are being as positive as possible with your child. Aim for 10 positive comments for every negative one that you make to your child. You may have to search very hard or be very creative in “catching your child being good.”

IF YOUR CHILD HAS BEEN THE VICTIM OF BULLYING

- Have your child practice straightforwardly and assertively telling the other child to “stop bothering me” and then moving away.
- Problem-solve with your child about what she can do to avoid situations in which she may be bullied, and what to do the next time she is bullied (e.g., walking to school with a parent, older sibling, or friend; telling a responsible adult if she is bullied).

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- Try to supervise situations in which bullying may occur. If you cannot be present, try to find someone who can. If no one is available, consider not letting your child participate in that situation.
- Be aware of the toll that bullying may be taking on your child's self-esteem. Actively look for ways to boost your child's self-image (e.g., supporting him in pursuing his skills or talents).
- Let your child's school psychologist, teacher, or guidance counselor know about your concerns, and ask for their assistance in addressing the problem. Many schools have anti-bullying programs. If your school doesn't, suggest that it start one.

IF 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 and promotes safety. Suggest to your child that she take a friend with her when she tells about bullying, to make it easier.
- Help your child support children who tend to be victims. Teach your child to try to include these children in activities.



Portions of this tool were modeled on: Slaby RG, Bernstein JY. 2000. Bullying—It's not O.K. In Sege R, ed., *Violence Prevention for Children and Youth: Parent Education Cards* (2nd ed.). Waltham, MA: Massachusetts Medical Society. Phone: (800) 322-2303.

Source: Adapted, with permission, from Batsche G, Moore B. 2000. Bullying fact sheet. In *Behavioral Interventions: Creating a Safe School Environment*. Winter 2000, pp. 10–12. Bethesda, MD: National Association of School Psychologists.