

Healthy Social Development and Bullying Prevention

TEACHING CHILDREN HOW TO INTERACT WITH OTHERS IN HEALTHY WAYS will benefit them not only at school, but also throughout their lives. It will also help them recognize inappropriate behaviors such as bullying. Bullying is a pattern of aggressive behavior that makes another person feel hurt, degraded, threatened or humiliated. Some examples of bullying include name calling, pushing, leaving others out of an activity and vandalizing personal possessions. Cyberbullying occurs when these activities take place through computer communications and the internet.

It is important to help your child understand what bullying is and what they can do if they are bullied or see others being bullied. All kids involved in bullying—whether they are bullied, bully others, or see bullying—can be affected. It is important to support all kids involved to make sure the bullying doesn't continue and effects can be minimized.

You can help your children develop social skills and form healthy relationships with their peers by:

- › Providing a safe and healthy atmosphere at home
- › Keeping the lines of communication open between family members
- › Encouraging them to play with other children outside school hours, hosting sleepovers, and joining clubs and groups
- › Teaching your child what qualities to look for in a friend, such as someone who makes them feel comfortable and likes them for who they are
- › Practicing conversation skills like asking questions and listening and explaining the kinds of comments that might upset others, lead to teasing and get in the way of making friends—for example, 'Your hair is always messy'
- › Talking about how different situations at school and with friends might be handled—for example, 'Maybe if you shared your new toy it might help.' or 'Smiling makes people feel happier. It helps if you smile when you first meet people.'
- › Talking with your child about what bullying is, why bullying is wrong and what they can do if they witness their peers being bullied
- › Teaching children not to participate in teasing or hurting other children
- › Teaching children that reporting bullying is different from tattling on someone- bullying hurts someone and can be stopped
- › Encouraging children to seek help from teachers or other adults if they see someone being bullied (If they are scared to tell by themselves, they should seek help with a friend or even an older sibling)



Is Your Child Being Bullied?

Many times kids won't ask for help, so it is important to know what to look for. If your child is at immediate risk of harming himself or others, get help right away.

Children react to bullying in different ways. Some signs that a child is being bullied may include:

- › Shy, insecure, suffers from low self-esteem
- › Torn articles of clothing or missing belongings
- › Unexplainable bruises, cuts or scrapes
- › Fear of going to school or participating in organized activities
- › Anxious or depressed when returning home from school
- › Quiet or seems withdrawn
- › Complains of illness such as stomachaches
- › Changes in eating or sleeping habits
- › Has trouble sleeping or often has bad dreams

Here are some tips to help your child if he or she is being bullied:

- › Listen to what your child says
- › Support your child by talking about how to solve the problem
- › Avoid blaming your child for provoking the situation; this can make the child feel further victimized and may close the lines of communication
- › Ask specific questions about what, who, where, and how long the bullying has been happening
- › Encourage your child to continue being themselves—changing their ways for others is not the right solution to end bullying
- › Teach your child how to step away from the bullying situations instead of fighting back, which may make matters worse
- › Contact the school, principal or teacher immediately



Avoid these mistakes:

- › Never tell the child to ignore the bullying.
- › Do not blame the child for being bullied. Even if he or she provoked the bullying, no one deserves to be bullied.
- › Do not tell the child to physically fight back against the kid who is bullying. It could get the child hurt, suspended, or expelled.
- › Parents should resist the urge to contact the other parents involved. It may make matters worse. School or other officials can act as mediators between parents.

Follow-up. Show a commitment to making bullying stop. Because bullying is behavior that repeats or has the potential to be repeated, it takes consistent effort to ensure that it stops.

Is Your Child Bullying Others?

Signs a Child is Bullying Others Kids may be bullying others if they:

- › Get into physical or verbal fights
- › Have friends who bully others
- › Are increasingly aggressive
- › Get sent to the principal's office or to detention frequently
- › Have unexplained extra money or new belongings
- › Blame others for their problems
- › Don't accept responsibility for their actions
- › Are competitive and worry about their reputation or popularity



Finding out your child is a bully may come as a shock. As a parent, you may feel disappointed or angry. Feelings of denial are also common. It is important to remember children act differently in different social settings. Guiding children and teaching them appropriate behavior is a big responsibility.

Here are some useful tips to help STOP your child from bullying others:

- › Tell your child that it is unkind to make others feel unhappy
- › Tell your child that bullying is inappropriate and explain how you expect their behavior to change (making expectations clear helps children recognize desired behavior)
- › Help them recognize appropriate social skills and learn the kind of behavior that is appreciated and accepted by praising them for kind acts offered to other children
- › Spend more time with your child and monitor his or her behavior
- › Surround your child with positive role models
- › Teach your child other ways to make and keep friends
- › Seek help from school counselors

Follow-up. After the bullying issue is resolved, continue finding ways to help the child who bullied to understand how their actions affect other people. For example, praise acts of kindness or talk about what it means to be a good friend.

What Can Your Child Do to Help Stop Bullying?

Bystanders Even if a child is not directly involved in bullying, they may be contributing to the behavior. Witnessing the behavior may also affect the child.

Here are some things bystanders can do to stop and prevent bullying:

- › **Be a friend to the person being bullied.** Reaching out to the person being bullied by talking to them, sitting with them at lunch or inviting them to play during recess helps them know they are not alone.
- › **Tell a trusted teacher, family member or coach.** Adults can help stop bullying, but only if they know about it. If your child has already talked to an adult and it appears nothing has changed, you may need to get more adults involved. Teachers, counselors, custodians, nurses and parents can all help to address and prevent bullying.
- › **Lend a hand.** Bystanders can sometimes help the person being bullied by causing a distraction to draw attention away from the bully, or giving the person being bullied a reason to leave the scene. For example, a bystander could say, “Come on, we need to get to class.” Or “Mr. Smith needs to see you right now.”
- › **Speak up and walk away.** Let those who bully know that it is not funny or entertaining. Don’t provide an audience because that often encourages bullying behavior.
- › **Set a good example.** Get involved in anti-bullying campaigns and projects.

Cyberbullying

Using the internet, cell phones, or other electronic means to send or post text or images intended to hurt or embarrass another person is called cyberbullying. Cyberbullying affects almost half of all American teens, but most victims say they have never told a parent or other adult about their negative online experiences.

Like other forms of bullying, teens may engage in cyberbullying because they think that it is harmless or funny, or because the behavior is encouraged by their friends. Teens who might not engage in other forms of bullying may engage in cyberbullying because they believe that their online behavior cannot be tracked or because they are unaware of the serious consequences of their actions.

Children who are cyberbullied are more likely to use drugs and/or alcohol, skip school, experience in-school bullying, receive poor grades, have lower self-esteem, and experience depression or suicidal thoughts.



Some other early warning signs that a child may be a target of cyberbullying are:

- › Unexpectedly stop using their devices
- › Seem anxious when using their device or receiving a notification
- › Appear angry, depressed or frustrated after going online
- › Lose interest in things that matter most to them
- › Become unusually secretive, especially when it comes to online activities

If your child is being cyberbullied, save all the evidence of the bullying and report the abuse to the website moderator or your internet or cell phone provider. Many websites have a tool to report abuse. This link provides a list of commonly used websites and their individual report links: cyberbullying.org/report/. If bullying continues, alert school officials and the parents of the other children involved so they can help stop it.

Your child could be involved with cyberbullying if they display some of these behaviors:

- › Quickly switches screens, or hides their device when you are nearby
- › Laughs indecently at their device, but refuses to show you what is so funny
- › Appears to be using an account that is not their own
- › Demonstrates insensitivity towards other teens
- › Appears overly concerned with maintaining their status in a particular social circle



It is important to address cyberbullying with your child.

Victim or perpetrator, it is up to us to provide the guidance and support our kids need. For more information, visit:

- › StopBullying.gov
- › www.pacer.org/bullying/
- › preventingbullying.promoteprevent.org/cyberbullying/
- › www.childrensafetynetwork.org/injury-topics/bullying-prevention
- › www.pinterest.com/childrensafety/school-safety-bullying/

HERE'S HELP



Use the **Family Resources on pages 72–78** to learn about a variety of family support services available in your community.