

Bullying is when an aggressor(s) repeatedly engages in negative actions against another student in an attempt to exercise control over the victim.

Why Students Bully?

Students who bully have strong needs for power and (negative) dominance.
Students who bully find satisfaction in causing injury and suffering to other students.
Students who bully are often rewarded in some way for their behavior with material or psychological rewards.

How Do I Know If My Child Is Being Bullied?

There are some warning signs that you can look for if you think your child is being bullied.

Be concerned if your child

- comes home with torn, damaged, or missing pieces of clothing, books, or other belongings
- has unexplained cuts, bruises, and scratches
- has few, if any, friends with whom he or she spends time
- seems afraid of going to school or walking to and from school
- seems afraid to ride the school bus or take part in activities with peers (such as clubs)
- takes a long, "illogical" route when walking to or from school or the bus stop
- has lost interest in schoolwork or suddenly begins to do poorly in school
- appears sad, moody, teary, or depressed when he or she comes home
- talks frequently about headaches, stomach-aches, or other physical problems
- has trouble sleeping or has frequent bad dreams
- has a loss of appetite
- appears anxious and/or suffers from low self-esteem

If your child shows any of these signs, it does not necessarily mean that he or she is being bullied, but it is worth checking out. (These could also be signs of other problems, such as depression, lack of friendships, or lack of interest in school.)

Here are some ways you can begin talking about bullying with your child

- I'm interested in your thoughts and feelings about bullying. What does the word "bullying" mean to you?
- Do you ever see students at your school being bullied by other students? How does it make you feel?
- What do you usually do when you see bullying going on?
- Have you ever tried to help someone who was being bullied? What happened? What do you think you can do if it happens again?
- Would you feel like a "tattletale" if you told an adult that someone was bullying?
- Have you ever called another person names? Do you think that is bullying? Talk more about that.
- Do you or your friends ever leave other students out of activities? (Talk more about this type of bullying.)
- Is your school doing special things to try to prevent bullying? If so, tell me about your school's rules and programs against bullying.
- What things do you think parents could/should do to help stop bullying?

How Much Bullying Happens in the United States?

In a U.S. study of bullying, with more than 15,000 students in grades 6 through 10, researchers found that 17 percent of students said they had been bullied "sometimes" or more often during the school term. Eight percent had been bullied at least once a week. Nineteen percent had bullied others "sometimes" or more often during the term. Nine percent had bullied other students at least once a week.

What Are the Consequences of Bullying?

Students who are bullied may become depressed and have low self-esteem. Many of them may have health problems such as stomachaches and headaches. Their schoolwork is likely to suffer too. Some bullied students may have suicidal thoughts and may even end their own lives. The effects on students who are bullied can last far into the future, long after they are out of school. It is an obvious human right for every student to feel safe in school and spared the experience of being bullied. Students who bully others also have problems, but different ones. Many bullying students are involved in other "antisocial" behaviors, such as breaking rules, shoplifting, and harming property. They may also drink alcohol and smoke at a young age and carry a weapon.

There are also clear signs that students who bully, in particular boys, are at a greater risk of being involved in crime when they are older. These facts make it clear that preventing bullying is important also for the sake of students who bully others. Bystanders who witness bullying are affected as well. They often feel afraid at school. They may also feel powerless to change the situation, or perhaps guilty for not taking action. Alternatively, they may be drawn into the bullying themselves and feel bad about it afterward.

What Can I Do If I Think My Child Is Being Bullied?

- Share your concerns with your child's teacher. He or she is trained to deal with bullying situations so the bullying will stop. He or she will take your concerns seriously.
- Talk with your child. Tell him or her that you are concerned and ask some questions, such as; are students teasing you at school, is anybody picking on you at school, are there students who are leaving you out of activities at school on purpose?
- Try to find out more about your child's school life in general.
- If your child is being bullied, he or she may be afraid or embarrassed to tell you. Here are some questions you could ask:
 - Do you have any special friends at school this year? Who are they?
 - Whom do you sit with at lunch or on the bus?
 - Are there any students at school you really don't like? Why don't you like them?
 - Do they ever pick on you or leave you out of things?
- It is important that any adult (at home or at school) take action right away if a child reports bullying.
- Support your child and find out more about the bullying. Do not ignore the bullying or tell your child to ignore it. This sends the message that bullying is okay.
- Don't blame your child for the bullying. No matter what your child does, he or she does not deserve to be bullied.
- Listen carefully to what your child tells you about the bullying. Ask him or her to describe what happened. Ask who was involved, where it happened, and if there were any witnesses.

- Tell him or her that bullying is wrong and not his or her fault. Say that you are glad he or she had the courage to speak up. Tell him or her that you will do something about it and explain what you are going to do.
- If you disagree with how your child handled the bullying, don't criticize him or her.
- Do not tell your child to fight back. This is not likely to end the problem and could make it worse by getting your child in trouble at school.
- Control your own emotions. Step back and think carefully about what you will do next.
- If your child begs you not to talk to anyone at school about the bullying, you might say, "What happened is wrong. It is against the school's rules and has to stop. Parents have agreed to be a part of keeping all students safe at your school. We need to let school staff know about this. We promise to do all that we can to make things better for you, not worse." Never promise your child that you will not tell school staff if you plan to do so.
- Do not talk to the parents of the child who bullied your child. Let school staff do this.
- Expect the bullying to stop. Talk often with your child and his or her teacher to make sure this happens. Although a child who is bullied is never responsible for the bullying, there are things you can do to help your child handle the situation:
 - Encourage your child to develop interests and hobbies that will help him or her handle difficult situations like bullying.
 - Encourage your child to spend time with friendly students in his or her class. Allow your child to spend time with these children outside of school, if possible.
 - Help your child meet new friends outside of school.
 - Teach your child safety strategies, such as how to seek help from an adult.
 - Make sure your home is a safe and loving place for your child. Take time to talk with your child often.
- If you and your child need additional help, talk with a school counselor and/or mental health professional.

What Can I Do If My Child Is Bullying Others?

- Make it clear to your child that you take bullying seriously and that bullying is not okay.
- Develop clear rules within your family for your child's behavior. Praise your child for following the rules and use nonphysical and logical consequences when rules are broken. A logical consequence for bullying behavior might be a loss of privileges for a while, such as using the phone to call friends, using email to talk with friends, and other activities your child enjoys.
- Spend lots of time with your child and carefully supervise and monitor his or her activities. Find out who your child's friends are and how and where they spend their free time.
- Build on your child's talents by trying to get him or her involved in positive activities (such as clubs, music lessons, and nonviolent sports). Be sure to watch his or her behavior in these places as well.
- Share your concerns with your child's teacher, counselor, and/or principal. Work together to send a clear message to your child that his or her bullying must stop.
- If you and your child need additional help, talk with a school counselor and/or mental health professional.

What If My Child Isn't Involved in Bullying?

Bullying affects everyone at school, because it affects the entire school climate. Your child might not be directly involved in bullying but still might be afraid of certain students or areas of the school where bullying takes place. Your child is probably aware of bullying problems or may have seen bullying happen. In that case, he or she is involved either by supporting the bullying or by not supporting it, either by taking action to stop it or by doing nothing about it. Children who are not directly involved have a key role to play in stopping and preventing bullying.

You can also help your child learn how to stop and prevent bullying by talking about it at home. Encourage your child to share with you his or her thoughts and concerns about school life.

Here are some ways you can begin talking about bullying with your child:

- I'm interested in your thoughts and feelings about bullying. What does the word "bullying" mean to you?
- Do you ever see students at your school being bullied by other students? How does it make you feel?
- What do you usually do when you see bullying going on?
- Have you ever tried to help someone who was being bullied? What happened? What do you think you can do if it happens again? Can I help you think through or practice some ways of responding?
- Would you feel like a "tattletale" if you told an adult that someone was bullying? (Talk about how it is not tattling but doing the right thing to help someone who is being bullied.)
- Would you be willing to tell someone if you had been bullied? Why? Why not? Would you feel comfortable telling me? Whom at school might you tell?
- Have you ever called another person names? Do you think that is bullying? Talk more about that.
- Do you or your friends ever leave other students out of activities? (Talk more about this type of bullying.)
- What do you think needs to happen at school to stop bullying?
 - Is your school doing special things to try to prevent bullying? If so, tell me about your school's rules and programs against bullying.