



My Child Might Be Bullying. What can I do?

When you hear that your child may be involved in bullying it is normal to feel at a loss and not know what to do. Try to listen calmly, and get the facts. There are many reasons a child or teen may be bullying. They may be feeling insecure, or be the victim of a bully themselves. They might have seen other children bullying others. They may think that bullying can get them what they want, including social acceptance. Sometimes they don't even realize their actions are considered bullying – especially when all they did was read or forward a message about another child, as often happens in cyberbullying.

Regardless of the reason, it is important that you help your child deal with it as soon as possible. Without help, your child is at risk of serious academic, social, emotional, and even legal problems. Here are some things you can do:

- **Talk with your child.** Find out what is going on in his or her life. Ask questions and listen to the answers. Ask if he or she is being bullied by someone else, and invite discussion about bullying. Listen carefully and gather facts. Your role is to listen to determine what may be triggering the bullying behavior so you can help.
- **Be involved in your child's life.** Spend time with your child and his or her friends. Ask questions about what they are doing. Monitor their

activities when they are at your house to learn more about what they are doing.

- **Teach empathy, respect, and compassion.** Let your child know that bullying is never ok. Ask your child about how he or she is feeling, and talk to him or her about other's feelings. Here are some ways to help a child learn empathy:
 - *Teach your child to name his or her emotions.* Talk about feelings and name them so your child can begin to identify what he or she is feeling.
 - *Role play.* Ask your child to pretend he or she is being bullied. Talk about how he or she is feeling in that situation. For younger children, you can also pretend with stuffed animals or puppets.
 - *Use stories, books, and movies.* Tell or read a story or watch a movie about a child who is being bullied. Talk about how that child feels as you are reading or watching.
 - *Highlight caring actions.* When you see your child doing something kind for someone, let him or her know you noticed. You can also ask your child to teach a skill they have to a younger child that you know (a younger brother, a cousin, a friend's child, etc.).



- **Set clear, consistent consequences for bullying and enforce them.** Talk about bullying and work together to create clear family rules about it. Explain what the consequences will be if anyone bullies, and make sure that you follow through on the consequences every time the rule is broken.
- **Seek help, if necessary.** Talk to your child's teacher, school social worker or principal. Ask if the school offers bullying prevention programs. Work together to develop a plan to help your child. Seek the assistance of your pediatrician or a mental health professional, if you think something else may be going on. Sometimes, children with disabilities or behavioral disorders bully other children or act in ways that may be mistaken for bullying.
- **Be realistic. It takes time to change behavior.** Be patient with your child. Applaud his or her success, and let them know you love and support them. Continue to talk to them and reinforce that bullying is not acceptable in your family or in society.

- *Work together as a family to make a difference in your community.* Participate in community service as a family. This will not only teach your child about empathy, but may also expose them to people who are different than them.
- **Keep your computer in a common area of the house.** Keep the computer in an area of the house that is shared by everyone, and monitor your child's use of the computer. Set clear rules about how the computer is to be used, and enforce consequences. Talk to your child about appropriate internet etiquette.
- **Be a positive example for your child.** Show your child the right way to treat people by being respectful of others. Resolve conflicts in a peaceful way, and respect other's opinions. Model appropriate ways of handling frustration and anger.



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