



Preventing Bullying

What is bullying?

Every adult plays an important role in addressing bullying and making schools a safe, caring, respectful place for children.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services defines bullying as an aggressive behavior that is intended to cause harm or distress, occurs repeatedly over time and involves an imbalance of power or strength.

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); unwanted sexual contact (sexual bullying); and sending insulting messages by e-mail or social media sites (cyberbullying).

Warning signs of bullying

- Dislikes or has lost interest in school work
- Has few, if any, friends
- Appears sad, anxious or moody when talking about school
- Complains of headaches, stomach aches
- Has unexplained cuts, bruises and/or scratches
- Appears afraid of going back to school
- Returns from school with torn, damaged or missing articles of clothing, books or belongings
- Has trouble sleeping and/or has frequent nightmares

The dangers of bullying

Bullying among children has been happening for hundreds of years, but only recently has it been brought to the forefront of our society's consciousness. Tragedies in schools across the country have led to increased public awareness and scientific research into the psychological damage caused by bullying.

Bully victimization has been found to be related to lower self-esteem, higher rates of depression, loneliness and anxiety. Victims have higher school absenteeism rates, report experiencing poorer general health and are more likely to have suicidal thoughts than their non-bullied peers.

Specifically, those who reported being bullied at least once a week were twice as likely as their peers to "wish they were dead" or admit to having a recurring idea of taking their own life.

Bullying also can have long-term psychological effects, as a study of males in their 20s found that those who had been bullied in school were more depressed and had lower self-esteem than their non-bullied peers.



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Responding to bullying

Never think of bullying as just a matter of “kids being kids.” It is a serious problem and should be treated as such. Your child deserves to grow up and attend schools in a safe, comfortable environment. Take the following steps if you feel that your child might be a victim of bullying.

Empower your child. Children are often reluctant to tell adults about bullying because they are ashamed, embarrassed or fearful of retaliation, so it is important to praise them for being brave enough to speak up. Practice with your child what he or she can say if being bullied or how to report a situation to a bus driver or teacher.

Ask questions. By asking questions, you can find out who was involved, what occurred and where and when it happened. Comforting the child and offering support by nodding and verbally encouraging him or her to go on will help to fully understand the situation.

Assess the situation. Is the bullying still happening? Has the bullying extended into the classroom, bus, lunchroom, etc.? Do they fear what will happen if they report the bullying? Talk with the child about what he or she needs to feel and be safe. Explore possible actions your child may take to be safer such as eating lunch with another child.

Inform your child’s school. Your child should never be fearful of another child or going to school, so you need to take the proper actions to prevent any further harm. Work with the school authorities or your child’s teacher to address the bullying. School authorities need to know about the problem to properly address it and create a solution. You also may want to consult with a counselor on how to move forward with your child.

Find out **who** was involved, **what** occurred and **where** and **when** these acts happened.

