

Bullying: Know the Facts!



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Most people would be surprised to learn that bullying can start as early as preschool. Sadly, teasing is a part of growing up. Hopefully, it is in good fun with family and friends for the most part, but words can cause pain in any circumstance. Teasing becomes bullying when it is repetitive or when there is a conscious intent to hurt another child. Bullying can be verbal (either by name calling or threatening), psychological (such as spreading rumors or excluding children from games) or physical bullying (like hitting, pushing or taking another child's possessions).

How Bullying Starts

Bullying behavior is prevalent throughout the world and it cuts across socioeconomic, racial, ethnic, and cultural lines. Bullying can begin as early as preschool and intensify during transitional stages, such as starting school in the first grade or going into middle school.

Victims of bullying are often shy and tend to be physically weaker than their peers. They may also have low self-esteem and poor social skills, which makes it difficult for them to stand up for themselves. Bullies consider these children safe targets because they usually don't retaliate.

Effects of Bullying

It isn't always easy to see if your child is being bullied or is the bully. If your child is the victim of bullying, he may suffer physically and emotionally, and his schoolwork will likely show it. Grades may drop because your child is only focused on protecting themselves, fitting in or not being alone.

Bullies are affected too, even into adulthood; they may have difficulty forming positive relationships.



Warning Signs

If you're concerned that your child is a victim of teasing or bullying, look for these signs of stress:

- Very passive and withdrawn on a day-to-day basis
- Cries a lot for no particular reason
- Complaints of stomachaches and headaches or sickness for no foreseeable reason
- Bruises that can't be explained
- Sudden drop in grades
- Not wanting to go to school
- Change in friends or having little to no friends
- Self-esteem drops

How to Help

First, give your child space to talk. If she recounts incidences of teasing or bullying, be empathetic. If your child has trouble verbalizing her feelings, read a story about children being teased or bullied. You can also use puppets, dolls, or stuffed animals to encourage a young child to act out their problems.

Once you've opened the door, help your child begin to solve the problem. Role-play situations and teach your child ways to respond. You might also need to help your child find a way to move on by encouraging her to reach out and make new friends. She might join teams and school clubs to widen her circle.

At Home and on the Playground:

Adults need to intervene to help children resolve bullying issues. Tell the teacher, even if the bullying occurs outside the school. A counselor, coach, or after-school program director may also be able to help mediate a productive discussion.

At School:

Many schools (sometimes as part of a statewide effort) have programs specially designed to raise awareness of bullying behavior and to help parents and teachers deal effectively with it. Check with your local school district to see if it has such a program.

Schools and parents can work effectively behind the scenes to help a child meet and make new friends through study groups or science lab partnerships. If you are concerned about your child:

- Share with the teacher what your child has told you.
- Ask the teacher if she sees similar behavior at school.
- If she hasn't seen any instances of teasing, ask

that she keep an eye out for the behavior you described.

- After the initial conversation, be sure to make a follow-up appointment to discuss how things are going.
- If the problem persists, or the teacher ignores your concerns, and your child starts to withdraw or does not want to go to school, consider the possibility of "therapeutic intervention." Ask to meet with the school counselor or psychologist, or request a referral to the appropriate school professional.

Also, try to remember that the bully himself is also just a child. Here is a list of some possible reasons why children bully:

- May witness physical and verbal violence or aggression at home. They have a positive view of this behavior, and they act aggressively toward other people, including adults.
- May hit or push other children.
- Are often physically strong.
- May or may not be popular with other children who are the same age.
- Have trouble following rules.
- Show little concern for the feelings of others.

Bullying is nothing to take lightly at any age. It is important to talk to your children every day and to be involved in their lives, even while they are in school. If you notice any of these symptoms, please make sure you try to get to the bottom of it!

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