

# BULLYING



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Kids are struggling more than ever with both being bullies and being bullied at school. The problem is so much bigger because of the internet and social media. The effects of bullying include depression, social withdrawal, and even suicide. These kids don't realize how just one statement or picture can have such big implications. Kids think they are "just teasing", or "everyone says that", or "I didn't really mean it" or even sometimes "well that kid deserved it." And for the kids on the other side, they are struggling to fit in and struggling to find acceptance as they are trying to figure out who they are at such a confusing time in their life and a confusing world. They take things to heart even if the other kid was joking, and things can get very overwhelming very fast.

Bullying means to treat someone else in a way that is intimidating, overbearing or aggressive. It often takes place over time. It can include:

- Physical, such as hitting, pushing, kicking, or spitting
- Verbal, such as negative name-calling, derogatory comments or descriptions
- Social, such as deliberate isolation, or exclusion
- Written, such as hand-written notes or electronic messages
- Electronic, such as texting or posting pictures with negative messages on public websites

Anything that makes a child appear different can make them a target of a bully – socioeconomic class, race, health problems (even just going to the nurse to get medicine at lunch), unique physical features, school struggles, moral or religious beliefs, sexual orientation, etc.

Most kids will not come home and say they are being bullied. They may not understand what is happening and how much it is affecting them. They may be embarrassed or think there is nothing anyone can do. Pay attention to signs that your child may be struggling – falling grades, school avoidance, suddenly getting into trouble, complaining of headaches or stomach aches, being withdrawn or depressed. Ask open ended questions to let them know they can talk to you. Asking if they see other kids being mean or other kids feeling getting hurt may get them talking and then

you can ask if it has ever happened to them. Ask things like "did anything make you feel sad today?" and go through other emotions, happy, angry, uncomfortable, confused, excited. You will connect more with them and see how they are doing at school. Also, even if it's not your kid being bullied, just watching an incident can induce feelings of sadness and helplessness. Talk to your kids about these feelings and ideas of how they may be able to help the victim child.



## **WHAT IF MY KID IS THE BULLY???**

Watch how your kid plays with kids, invite them to your house or make sure you listen in when in groups. Pay attention to how you talk about other people in front of them, as adults we know often say things to our spouse or friend and we don't realize what our kids are hearing. They don't understand how to filter their thoughts and opinions and how to not hurt others. Help them understand that everyone is different. Help them develop a respect for every human being. Teach them empathy. Let them see you be respectful to people your kid may think are different. Get them talking to different people and get to know them. Also, children are sometimes bullying other kids because they themselves are depressed or overwhelmed. Talk with your child and your pediatrician to determine ways we can help the child.

## **HOW CAN I HELP MY CHILD THAT IS BEING BULLIED?**

First, always making sure your child knows you love them exactly how they are no matter what. Help them focus on what is true. The things the bully is doing and saying are wrong and not true. Help the child understand that the bully is probably hurting in some way and handling it the wrong way. Let the teachers and the school officials know what is going on and ask if they can set up a meeting with the other parent so they can be involved in helping find a solution. If your child can avoid the bully in some way help them do that. Often, if the mean comments are responded to with kindness the bully will stop because it's not getting the response they want.

Schools do have antibullying programs, but these have not yet proved to be effective. They often focus on specific targeted groups and tell kids not to bully them, but it often just causes the kids to target them more since now more attention has been drawn to their differences. Programs should focus on encouraging general respectfulness towards others. Parental involvement addressing the child who is acting as the bully is suggested and should be encouraged by the school. The most effective intervention has actually been shown to be a peer standing up for the victim. As parents we can help our children find ways to be kind and not afraid, and to get help from a teacher when needed.

Reference:

Trumbull MD, D. (2013). American College of Pediatrics. Retrieved from <https://www.acped.org/the-college-speaks/position-statements/societal-issues/bullying-at-school-never-acceptable>