



Wellness Monthly

Healthy matters to keep in mind.

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Bullying What To Do If Your Child Is Bullying Others

It's not easy to step in as a parent when you think your child is bullying. But bad behavior won't stop by itself. Instead, think about the success and happiness you want for your child in the future and how curbing bullying now will ensure progress toward that goal. Here is some information that can help.

What Is Bullying?

Bullying is repeated aggressive behavior in the form of a threat, physical assault or intimidation that is intentional. Kids bully for many reasons. Some do it because they feel insecure: picking on someone who seems emotionally or physically weaker provides a feeling of being more important, popular or in control. Others do it because they don't yet understand it's unacceptable to pick on other kids for differences, whatever those may be.¹

Bullying often is about power. The power could be physical strength, popularity or even having embarrassing information about someone. It is a common problem. Surveys indicate that as many as half of all children are bullied at some time during their school years, and at least 10 percent are bullied on a regular basis.² But bullying is always wrong, and sometimes it is even against the law.

Types of Bullying?

Bullying can take many forms. It can be physical, verbal or electronic. It can occur in schools, "after school" programs, the neighborhood, on the internet and cell phones (cyberbullying), on a sports team or at home between siblings. Bullying can include:³

- Name-calling, teasing or spreading rumors
- Leaving someone out of a group on purpose
- Giving someone the "silent treatment"
- Cyberbullying (using social media, IMs or texts to send mean messages)
- Making nasty faces or hand gestures at someone
- Making fun of someone for being different
- Hair-pulling, biting and pinching
- Threatening and scaring others
- Hitting, punching, yelling and shoving
- Telling other kids not to be friends with someone
- Embarrassing someone in public

The Effects of Bullying

Everyone involved in bullying—including kids who are bullied, bullies and bystanders—is at increased risk for mental health problems.⁴

- **Children who are bullied:** are at increased risk for depression, anxiety, health complaints, eating disorders, school absenteeism, running away, alcohol and drug abuse and self-injury, accidental injuries, poor school performance and suicidal behaviors. They are also at risk for becoming a bully.
- **Bystanders of bullying:** can feel guilt regarding inaction and may fear their environment is unsafe. They may feel powerless or may be drawn to bullying. They are at increased risk for developing depression and anxiety problems, abusing drugs and alcohol, and missing school.
- **Children who bully:** are at increased risk for getting into fights and committing crimes. They are more likely to abuse alcohol and drugs and to drop out of school. As an adult, those who have bullied are at increased risk to have criminal convictions and be abusive toward their romantic partners and children.

Signs A Child May Be Bullying Others

Sometimes children or teens may bully and not realize they are doing it. They may do so because they are having trouble handling their emotions or have seen violence up close in other parts of their lives. Here are some warning signs:⁷

- Gets into physical or verbal fights
- Has friends who bully others
- Is increasingly aggressive
- Gets sent to the principal's office or to detention frequently
- Has unexplained extra money or new belongings
- Blames others for their problems
- Doesn't accept responsibility for their actions
- Is competitive and worries about their reputation or popularity

The Roles Kids Play in Bullying

Even if a child is not directly involved in bullying, they may contribute to the behavior. Witnessing the behavior may also affect the child, so it is important for them to know what to do when they see bullying happen. In bullying, roles can include:⁵

- **Kids Who Assist:** may not start or lead the bullying, but serve as an “assistant” to children who are bullying. They may encourage bullying behavior and occasionally join in.
- **Kids Who Reinforce:** are not directly involved in bullying but give it an audience. They may laugh or provide support for children doing the bullying, encouraging it to continue.
- **Outsiders:** remain separate from the bullying situation, neither reinforcing the bullying nor defending the child being bullied. Some may watch but not show they are on anyone’s side, but providing an audience may encourage the bullying. These kids often want to help, but don’t know how.
- **Kids Who Defend:** actively comfort the child being bullied and may come to the child’s defense when bullying occurs.

Most kids play more than one role in bullying over time. They may be directly involved as the one bullying others. Or they may witness bullying and play an assisting or defending role. Every situation is different.

Starting at Home

When looking for influences on your child’s behavior, look first at what’s happening at home. Kids who live with yelling, name-calling, putdowns, harsh criticism or physical anger from a sibling or parent/caregiver may act that out in other settings.⁶

It’s natural—and common—for kids to fight with their siblings at home. Unless it is excessive or there’s a risk of physical violence, it can be appropriate not to get involved. But confront name-calling and physical altercations, and talk regularly about what’s acceptable and what’s not. Recognize and affirm appropriate behavior.

It’s important to keep your own behavior in check too. Watch how you talk to your kids and how you react to your own strong emotions when they’re around. If your family is going through a stressful life event that you feel may have contributed to your child’s behavior, reach out for help. Counselors, pastors, therapists and your doctor can help.

What Parents Can Do To Help Kids Stop

It can be upsetting to learn that your child has gotten in trouble for bullying. As difficult as it may be to process the news, it’s best to deal with it right away. Whether bullying is physical or verbal, try to act decisively and quickly. Here are some ideas:⁸

- **Set clear rules and expectations for behavior.** Let children know that bullying is unacceptable and there will be serious consequences if it happens. Provide consistent consequences if your child breaks the rules. Recognize and affirm appropriate behavior.
- **Try to understand the reasons behind your child’s behavior.** Kids may bully because they have trouble managing strong emotions like anger, frustration or insecurity. Or, they haven’t learned ways to work out conflicts and differences.
- **Spend more time with your child.** Carefully monitor their activities, including where and with whom they spend their time. Supervise their use of social networking sites and texting. Talk with their friends and their friends’ parents.
- **Build on your child’s strengths and positive attributes.** Encourage them to become involved in social activities with positive role models. Catch your kids being good. When they handle situations constructively or positively, praise them for it.
- **Teach children to treat others with respect and kindness.** Teach them it is wrong to ridicule differences (e.g., race, religion, appearance, special needs). Try to instill a sense of empathy for those who are different.
- **Talk with teachers, guidance counselors or your family doctor.** If your child has a history of arguing, defiance and trouble controlling anger, consider an evaluation with a therapist or behavioral health professional.
- **Set a good example.** Think about how you talk around your kids and how you handle conflict and problems. If you behave aggressively—toward or in front of your kids—chances are they’ll follow your example.

Resources

www.liveandworkwell.com

Visit liveandworkwell.com and do a search using the word “bullying” to access articles, links to resources, and the Safe Kids Center. For additional support, click on “Find a Provider” to make an appointment with a clinician in your area.

Ask your health benefits representative for your access code to liveandworkwell.com.

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1 “Teaching Kids Not To Bully,” Kids Health, http://kidshealth.org/parent/emotions/behavior/no_bullying.html#. Accessed December 2015.

2 American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP), FAQs, “What Is Bullying,” http://www.aacap.org/AACAP/Families_and_Youth/Resource_Centers/Bullying_Resource_Center/FAQ.aspx#question1. Accessed December 2015.

3 Ibid, AACAP.

4 Ibid, AACAP.

5 Stopbullying.gov, “The Role Kids Play,” <http://www.stopbullying.gov/what-is-bullying/roles-kids-play/index.html>. Accessed December 2015.

6 “Teaching Kids Not To Bully,” Kids Health, http://kidshealth.org/parent/emotions/behavior/no_bullying.html#. Accessed December 2015.

7 Stopbullying.gov, “The Warning Signs of Bullying,” <http://www.stopbullying.gov/blog/2015/10/29/warning-signs-bullying>. Accessed December 2015.

8 Ibid, KidsHealth.