

For Parents: Signs That Your Child Is Being Bullied



Bullying is very common. About 1 in 5 children and teens ages 12 to 18 report that they were bullied over the last 12 months.

Bullying can cause kids to feel depressed or anxious. Kids who are bullied can see their grades drop and are more likely to drop out of school, too.

As a parent, you play an important role in spotting and preventing bullying.

What to look for

It can be tough to know if your kid is being bullied. They may not want to tell you, and they may not always show signs. Some things to look for include:

- Injuries they can't explain
- Lost or destroyed personal items, like clothes, books, or electronics
- Frequent headaches or stomachaches. They may say they feel sick or don't want to go to school.
- Changes in eating habits. They may come home from school hungry because they skipped lunch.
- Trouble sleeping
- Sudden decline in grades
- Moodiness or more easily upset than normal
- Avoiding certain situations, like riding the school bus

If you think your kid is being bullied but isn't talking about it, you can find ways to bring it up. Talk about a bullying experience you had at their age. Read books together or watch TV shows or movies that deal with bullying, like *Wonder*. This way, they may more easily open up to you about their experiences.

Remember, kids don't tell adults that they are being bullied for many reasons. These include:

- They may feel helpless. If they handle it on their own, they feel like they have control.
- They are afraid of backlash from their bully.
- They think it's humiliating. They don't want an adult to judge them or see them as weak.
- They may already feel socially isolated. They don't think anyone cares or understands.
- They are afraid their friends will turn against them for being a snitch.
- They have concerns about how the adults may respond.

Make one thing clear to your kids: If they are being bullied, or see it happening to another kid, they should talk with an adult about it. That can be you, a teacher, a school counselor, or a therapist. But it's important to let someone know that it's going on.

What parents can do

If your kid is being bullied, it's normal to feel angry or upset. You may even be tempted to tell your kid to fight back. But don't give this advice. It could lead to more violence and someone getting hurt. Here are some things to encourage your child or teen to do instead:

- **Use the buddy system.** There's power in numbers. Encourage your kid to pair up with another friend on the bus, in hallways, or at lunch or recess—anywhere the bully will be. Tell them to use a different bathroom from the bully if possible, too.
- **Teach cool-down strategies.** Bullies thrive on conflict. If your kid gets angry or upset, it'll encourage the bully. Tell your child to count to 10 in their head, take some deep breaths, or simply walk away. It may be hard, but tell them to try not to show any emotion. If they cry, scowl, or even smile or laugh, they may encourage the bully. If the bully realizes that they truly don't care, they'll get bored and stop trying to bother your kid.
- **Get your child help.** It's important that they talk to someone they trust. This could be a school guidance counselor, an outside therapist, or a trusted teacher or coach. They may offer helpful advice, and they'll help your kid feel less alone.
- **Build their confidence.** Encourage your kid to join a new club or start a new sport. This way, they can meet new friends. They'll also feel good about themselves for trying something new.
- **Enlist your child's school.** While it might be tempting, don't call the bully's parents. That can just make things worse. Go straight to school administrators. They may be legally required to take certain steps under your state's anti-bullying laws. They can also help create a plan to support your child. Keep in mind that legally, the school can't tell you any steps they took to discipline the bully.

The good news is that there are more resources than ever today to help stop bullying. But if your kid threatens to run away, talks about suicide, or harms themselves, contact their healthcare provider right away for a referral to a licensed mental health counselor. You can also call **211** for community-based resources in your area.

Call 988

If your child is at immediate risk of harming themselves or others, call or text 988. Do not leave your child alone. When you call or text 988, you will be connected to trained crisis counselors at the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline. An online chat option is also available at 988lifeline.org. Lifeline is free and available 24/7.

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