

Bullies: Helping Your Child Cope



Bullying can happen in school, on the playground, and places where adults aren't around. Now bullying can even happen through texting or online through social media sites, apps, and gaming platforms. This is called cyberbullying. Bullying is intentional tormenting that can be physical, verbal, social, or psychological. Hitting, shoving, threatening, shunning, and spreading rumors can all be forms of bullying. Generally, children who are being bullied are either weaker or smaller. Kids at higher risk of bullying include those with disabilities or other special healthcare needs and those who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender. Kids who are bullied can become depressed, develop low self-esteem, avoid school, feel physically ill, and even think about killing themselves.

What to look for

There are few things as disturbing as finding out your child is being bullied. Other than seeing signs of physical harm like cuts or bruises, it may be hard to know about bullying unless your child tells you or you ask. That's why it's a good idea to bring up the subject, even if you don't think anything is wrong. Also, let your children know how important it is to tell an adult if they have been bullied. Or to tell an adult if they have seen any other kids being bullied.

Changes in your child's normal behavior may be warning signs of bullying. Signs to look for include:

- Anxiety
- Feelings of helplessness or decreased self-esteem
- Inability to sleep well or frequent nightmares
- Changes in eating habits, such as loss of appetite, suddenly skipping meals, or binge eating
- Frequent headaches or stomachaches, feeling sick, or faking sickness
- Declining grades, loss of interest in schoolwork, or not wanting to go to school
- Lost or damaged clothing, books, or electronics
- Wanting to avoid normal routines, such as taking the school bus
- Sudden loss of friends or avoiding social situations
- Self-destructive behaviors such as running away from home, harming themselves, or talking about suicide

How to help your child

The first thing you need to do is control your own emotions. One of the reasons kids don't tell parents about bullying is because they are afraid of their parents' reaction. Stay calm, offer support, and tell your child that you are going to help.

Never ignore bullying, and never tell your child to tough it out or fight back. Fighting back is almost always a bad idea. Kids who fight get hurt, and both kids may get in trouble.

Here are safe tips for helping your child:

- **Reassure your child.** Make sure your child knows that they are not to blame and should not be ashamed. Praise the courage it took to come forward and tell you about the problem.
- **Learn the facts.** Get all the information you can about the bullying. This includes who is involved, how often it happens, and where it takes place.

- **Let the correct authorities know.** Don't confront the bully's parents on your own. Leave that to school or other officials.
- **Get police help, medical attention, or both.** Immediately get help if a weapon is involved, there are threats of physical injury, there are threats of hate-motivated violence, there is bodily harm or sexual abuse, or there is any accusation of an illegal act.
- **Encourage safe activities and friendships.** You may want to ask your child's teacher for advice on participating in healthy activities such as the arts, clubs, or athletics.
- **Have a safety plan.** Talk about locations, groups of kids, and activities to avoid. Make sure your child uses the buddy system when at risk. Discuss where to go and whom to ask for help in case of an incident.

Bullying is a common problem for many kids, but as kids start to learn that bullying is never cool and that adults need to know about any acts of bullying, the situation should get better. Learn about your state's bullying laws. If you have tried all the standard ways to prevent bullying and still fear for your child's safety, you may need to contact legal authorities.

Finally, remember that many kids become bullies because they learn bullying at home. Children who are exposed to anger, shame, and violence are at risk of becoming bullies. You don't want your child to be bullied and you certainly don't want your child to be a bully. Make your home environment safe and supportive.

© 2000-2027 The StayWell Company, LLC. All rights reserved. This information is not intended as a substitute for professional medical care. Always follow your healthcare professional's instructions
This information is not intended as a substitute for professional medical care. Always follow your Healthcare professional's instructions. Copyright Krames LLC.