

What is Bullying?

Bullying is a widespread and serious problem that can happen anywhere. It is not a phase children have to go through, it is not "just messing around", and it is not something to grow out of. Bullying can cause serious and lasting harm.

Although definitions of bullying vary, most agree that bullying involves:

- **Imbalance of Power:** people who bully use their power to control or harm and the people being bullied may have a hard time defending themselves
- **Intent to Cause Harm:** actions done by accident are not bullying; the person bullying has a goal to cause harm
- **Repetition:** incidents of bullying happen to the same the person over and over by the same person or group

Types of Bullying

Bullying can take many forms. Examples include:

- **Verbal:** name-calling, teasing
- **Social:** spreading rumors, leaving people out on purpose, breaking up friendships
- **Physical:** hitting, punching, shoving
- **Cyberbullying:** using the Internet, mobile phones or other digital technologies to harm others

An act of bullying may fit into more than one of these groups.

Bully-proofing My Child

Bullying is not a normal rite of passage. It can have [serious consequences](#). You can help your child learn how to prevent bullying. These tips can help:

- **Help your child understand bullying.** Explain [what bullying is](#). It is more than physical; it can be done in person or over the phone or computer.
- **Keep open lines of communication with your child.** Check in with your child and listen to any concerns about friends and other students.
- **Encourage your child to pursue their interests.** Doing what they love may help your child be more confident among their peers and make friends with other kids with similar interests.
- **Teach your child to take a stand against bullying.** Give guidance about how to stand up to those who bully if it is safe to do so.
- **Talk to your child about seeking help from a trusted adult when feeling threatened by a bully.** Talk about whom they should go to for help and role-play what they should say. Assure your child that they should not be afraid to tell an adult when someone they know is being bullied.
- **Know what is going on in your child's school.** Visit the school website, subscribe to the student paper—if there is one—and join the PTA listserv or mailing list. Get to know other parents, school counselors, and staff. Contact the school by phone or e-mail if you have suggestions to make the school a safer and better learning place.

When children are involved in bullying, it is important for parents to be willing to take action.

Children often do not tell their parents that they are being bullied because they are embarrassed or frightened. If you [suspect your child is being bullied](#) or your child brings it up, consider these steps:

- **Talk with your child.** Focus on your child. Express your concern and make it clear that you want to help.
- **Empathize with your child.** Say bullying is wrong, that it is not their fault, and that you are glad they had the courage to tell you about it.
- **Work together to find solutions.** Ask your child what they think can be done to help. Reassure them that the situation can be handled privately.
- **Document ongoing bullying.** Work with your child to keep a record of all bullying incidents. If it involves cyberbullying, keep a record of all messages or postings.
- **Help your child develop strategies and skills for handling bullying.** Provide suggestions for [ways to respond to bullying](#), and help your child gain confidence by rehearsing their responses.
- **Be persistent.** Bullying may not be resolved overnight.
- **Stay vigilant to other possible problems that your child may be having.** Some of the [warning signs](#) may be signs of other serious problems. Share your concerns with a counselor at your child's school.


Working with Your Child's School

Parents are often reluctant to report bullying to school officials, but bullying may not stop without the school's help. Parents should never be afraid to call the school to report that their child is being bullied and ask for help to stop the bullying.

- **Know the school policies.** Ask for a copy or check the student handbook to see whether your school has standards in place that will help resolve the situation.
- **Open the line of communication.** Call or set up an appointment to talk with your child's teacher or school counselor and establish a partnership to stop the bullying.
- **Get help for your child.** Seek advice from your child's guidance counselor or other school-based health professionals. They may be able to help your child cope with the stress of being bullied.
- **Commit to making the bullying stop.** Talk regularly with your child and with school staff to see whether the bullying has stopped. You may need to seek an attorney's help or contact local law enforcement officials if the bullying persists or escalates.

What Not to Do

- **Never tell your child to ignore the bullying.** What the child may "hear" is that you are going to ignore it. Be supportive and gather information about the bullying. Often, trying to ignore bullying allows it to become more serious.

- **Do not blame your child for being bullied.** Do not assume that your child did something to provoke the bullying.
- **Do not encourage your child to harm the person who is bullying them.** It could get your child hurt, suspended, or expelled.
- **Do not contact the parents of the students who bullied your child.** It may make matters worse. School officials should contact the parents of the children involved.
- **Do not demand or expect a solution on the spot.** Indicate you would like to follow up to determine the best course of action. Also, be aware that the [law limits the ability of school personnel](#)  from revealing disciplinary actions taken against other students. Just because they cannot tell you if or how another student was disciplined, does not mean action was not taken.