

# IS MY CHILD BEING BULLIED?

## *How to recognize the signs of bullying and what to do to stop it*



Children often do not tell their parents or other adults that they are being bullied because they fear that the bully will "take revenge" and make the situation worse. Sometimes, parents find out what is going on through the child's friends or teacher. However, the best way to know if your child is being bullied is to be aware of the warning signs and to communicate with your children.

### TYPES OF BULLYING

**Physical** - pushing, kicking, hitting, other forms of violence or threats of violence

**Verbal** - name calling, teasing, spreading rumors

**Emotional** - excluding, shunning, ridicule, humiliation

**Racist** - racial taunts, gestures, graffiti

**Sexual** - unwanted physical contact/groping, sexual remarks, abusive comments, whistling

**Homophobic** - offensive remarks or action against those who are --or are perceived to be-- lesbian, gay, or bisexual

In other words, bullying is *harassment*, and it should not be tolerated. Bullying can take place face-to-face, or over the internet, also known as *cyberbullying*.

### THE SIGNS OF BULLYING

If youth demonstrate any of these behaviors, it *may* be indicative that they are a victim of bullying:

- ☛ not wanting to go to school
- ☛ skipping classes (especially ones the child may share with the bully)
- ☛ physical ailments, such as headaches, stomachaches, trouble sleeping, bed wetting, etc.
- ☛ nightmares
- ☛ damaged clothing
- ☛ injuries, such as unexplained bruises or cuts
- ☛ missing toys, money, or other belongings
- ☛ asking for extra pocket/lunch money; stealing
- ☛ a drop in grades/schoolwork
- ☛ fear about walking to and/or from school or riding the bus
- ☛ changing their route to school or begging parents to drive them
- ☛ anxiety, depression, or changes in mood
- ☛ coming home hungry (lunch money was taken)
- ☛ frequent crying
- ☛ starting to bully others, such as younger siblings
- ☛ secrecy about what is bothering them

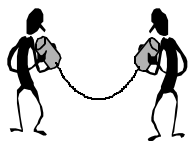
### THE EFFECTS OF BULLYING

Bullying can have devastating consequences on a child's emotional well-being, such as reduced self-esteem, negative self-image, and/or failure in school. In extreme cases, victims feel so terrible about themselves that they attempt suicide. Therefore, it is essential that adults intervene immediately and correct the problem. Although the above list provides some possible signs that children are being bullied, adults should find out more to confirm if their suspicions are true, then take action.

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## ***How to recognize the signs of bullying and what to do to stop it (continued)***

### **TAKING ACTION**



**Communicate:** If you suspect your children are being bullied, try to talk to them about it. Let them know that this problem is too big for them to handle on their own, and that there is nothing wrong in seeking help from adults. Inform them that you are there to listen, and though you will be careful not to do anything to make the situation worse, this problem can not be kept a secret. Discuss how you would like to help *before* you do it, and get your children's input.

**Stay calm:** It is natural to feel protective and angry that someone is mistreating your children. You may even want to see your child "fight back." Your first impulse may be to call the other child's parents to give them a piece of your mind. However, it is important to stay calm, provide comfort, and a listening ear at first. Then, think about how to stop the bullying in a *positive* and *proactive* manner. The goal should be to stop the bullying - not escalate the situation.

**Uncover the Facts:** Get the details of what happened, when, and by whom and write it all down. Tell your children the importance of telling the whole truth.



**Notify school staff:** Bullying needs to come out into the open if it is going to stop. End the secrecy by talking with your child's teacher and principal. Take your written account of what happened to the meeting. Find out what the school's policies and procedures are for violence prevention and bullying. When the bully's parents learn of the situation, they may feel defensive. Therefore, it may be more effective to have school staff discuss the problem with them.

**Teach children ways to stand up for themselves:** Though children should not be solely responsible for stopping bullying, here are a few tips that may help them stand up for themselves.

- ✓ Ignoring the bullying seldom stops it. Bullies know that they can tease those who are quiet, passive/non-assertive because they can get away with it. Therefore, teach children to look the bully in the eye and say in a stern tone, "stop bothering me" or "yeah, whatever", then **walk away**. Tell them to avoid an interchange with the bully, since getting a rise out of their victim is exactly what they want.
- ✓ If the bully fails to get a rise out of your children, it may stop. However, it is still important to have them tell an adult about the problem before the bully finds another victim or someone gets seriously hurt. Also, bullies may need guidance from adults in learning positive ways to relate to others.
- ✓ Work out a plan with your children for times when the bully follows them around while taunting them. For example, turn around and say, "leave me alone" then walk toward an adult.
- ✓ Practice the above skills with your children at home during a role play. That way, it will be easier for them to stand up for themselves when it really happens at school.
- ✓ Above all, teach them that it is important NOT to retaliate with violence, as they could then be accused (and punished) for bullying!
- ✓ Oftentimes victims later become bullies themselves. It is important to let your children know that it is neither okay to harass others nor ignore it when it happens to someone else.

**The healing process:** Children who have been the victims of bullying need to feel good about themselves again. Tell them not to believe the lies and rumors spread about them. Teach them that children bully to get a reaction and attention themselves; it does not mean that something is "wrong" with them! Praise your children for their accomplishments to build their self-esteem.

Sources: "Help Your Child Stand up to School Yard Bullies!!" by the Ontario Association for Families of Children with Communication Disorders at [www.oafccd.com/factsehh/fact28.htm](http://www.oafccd.com/factsehh/fact28.htm); "Possible Signs of Bullying" by AngliaCampus, the UK's leading on-line education service, at [www.angliacampus.com](http://www.angliacampus.com); "Possible Signs of Bullying" and "What is Bullying" by Kidscape at [www.kidscape.org.uk/parents/](http://www.kidscape.org.uk/parents/); "Signs of Bullying" by Michele Borba at [www.parenthood.com](http://www.parenthood.com).