



What to Do If Your Child Is Being Bullied



It's difficult for parents when they discover their child is being bullied. It's even more distressing when they learn it's been going on for some time.

The good news is that although most children in the United States experience bullying, the majority of them find ways to deal with it. Unfortunately, though, some children get stuck as targets of bullying for months or even years. These children need support from schools and parents so they can get "unstuck."

Most children will not tell an adult they are being bullied because they often feel embarrassed. They also fear that telling adults may make the problem worse. That's why it's important for parents to keep their antennae up when their children talk about how they are treated by kids their own age or older.

Some telltale signs of a child who is being bullied include appearing more lonely or sad, suddenly disliking or refusing to go to school, not talking anymore about friends he or she mentioned in the past or playing alone often.



Here are some steps you can take if you suspect your child is being repeatedly or continually bullied:

- **Talk with your child** to find out for certain if her or she is being bullied, and if so, the extent of it. It's unlikely that he or she will tell you much the first time you ask about bullying. Remember, your child doesn't know what you are going to do with the information. At first, your child may tell you only a little about what is happening to see how you respond.
- **React with compassion.** When you react with empathy and appreciation for how difficult it is to be disliked or bullied by a peer, you invite your child to become part of the solution.
- **Assure your child that you are there to help him or her figure out how to handle the problem** and to make sure he or she is safe and protected. Let your child know you are going to do whatever you can to help out in a way that will not be embarrassing to him or her.

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- **Once trust is established, gather all the information** about who is involved, how the bullying is happening, what form it is taking (physical, relational, cyber) and where it is taking place. Also find out who was present (peers, teachers, bus driver, etc.) and what they did in response to the bullying.
- **After talking with your child, share the important information with your child's teachers and school administrators** to alert them that your child is being bullied. Letting children know that adults are paying attention to them and their peers' behavior in places where bullying typically occurs helps them feel more comfortable at school and can prevent further bullying from occurring.
- **Observe whether there is anything about your child or what he or she is doing that might be attracting bullies.** Sometimes things might be obvious but there are others we don't really like to talk about with kids because it's uncomfortable for parents. So if it's an obvious problem — personal hygiene, crying a lot during school, overreacting to other children by saying mean things or refusing to play, or failing to wait a turn during games — teach and practice new, appropriate skills with your child and reward the use of these skills. This can essentially remove the target from your child's back.
- **Teach your child how to strengthen his or her reputation and relationships with peers.** Research shows that having just one friend or making one new friend can help protect children from further bullying and reduce the negative consequences that come from victimization.
- **Build on your child's strengths.** Peers gravitate toward children who get positive attention from their peers and excel at activities. A good way to help children build up their standing with peers is to put them in situations where they can do well and peers can see the positive things about them. The key here is to help your child identify his or her strengths and talents, and discuss ways to highlight and use them with others.



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Bullying can cause long-term emotional harm to children. No child should find themselves all alone when navigating the dangerous and destructive waters of bullying. All adults — parents, teachers, administrators and others — must work together as champions for all children, especially those who are most vulnerable.

Additional Resources

- cyberbullying.org
- stopbullying.gov
- empowerment.unl.edu
- **Nebraska Bullying Prevention and Intervention Initiative**

➡ **For more information** or to make an appointment at the Boys Town Center for Behavioral Health, call **531-355-3358**.

Visit **BoysTown.org/Parenting** for more information from the parenting experts at Boys Town.