Bullying at school: helping your child

Bullying is something that grown-ups need to treat very seriously. Rather than leaving it up to a child to sort out, schools, parents and community groups can work together to fight bullying.

Bullying can be devastating for children’s confidence and self-esteem. They need lots of love and support, both at home and wherever the bullying is happening. They also need to know that you will take action to prevent any further bullying.

If you suspect your child is being bullied, you could start with our overview of bullying and how to spot it. Or your child might be the one doing the bullying. Read our article on what to do if your child is bullying others.

Talking to your child’s school

If your child is being bullied, get the help of your school as quickly as you can. Schools take bullying extremely seriously. Your child’s teachers will be trained in spotting and handling bullying. They will work with you to try to prevent further bullying.

Your school will assess the situation with you. Schools will always focus first on protecting the victim. Then they will look at changing the bullying behaviour and deterring others from bullying. Their suggestions will depend on the circumstances of the bullying and on the children involved.

Ask the school for a copy of its policy on bullying. Also talk to the school about how the policy will be put into action in your child’s situation.

How to involve the school

- Tell your child you will talk to the school.
- Discuss the problem with the class teacher or year coordinator.
- Ask for the teacher’s views.
- Be assertive, not angry or accusatory.
- End the meeting with a plan for how the situation will be managed.
- Keep in touch with the school.

Contacting the bully or the bully’s parents directly is likely to make the situation worse. It is always safer to work with the school or organisation rather than to try to solve bullying on your own.

If the bullying doesn’t stop

- Remember that it is still safer to work through your school than to take matters into your own hands.
- Inform the school of any further bullying incidents. Keep a record of what happens and when.
- Write a note to the class teacher. Ask for your concern to be addressed in writing.
Speak to the school principal.

Request a meeting to discuss the matter with the school board.

Seek further advice from your school’s regional office, or legal advice about your options.

It takes time to change behaviour, so you might not see overnight results. Do let the school know, though, if your child continues to tell you about incidents of bullying.

If you’re not satisfied with the results, ask to see the school’s grievance procedure. If your child is still being bullied and you don’t think the school is doing enough to stop it, consider looking for another school with a better record of addressing bullying.

**Supporting your child at home**

**Give your child as much support and love as you can at home.** Continue to offer support at home while you, the teacher and your child come up with a plan for fixing the bullying. Let your child know that the situation is not his fault, and it can be fixed.

You can give support by listening and talking. You can also give your child ideas for coping with the bullying.

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**If your child is being bullied, you should always step in. But it can also be helpful to give your child some skills to handle any future bullying or negative social behaviour to stop it getting worse. These skills can help your child’s social development.**

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**Ideas for coping with bullying**

Talk to your child about some of the different ways of dealing with bullying behaviour and why these work. This will help your child feel more confident and less powerless about being bullied.

Here are some ideas.

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<tr>
<th>Idea</th>
<th>How it works</th>
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<tr>
<td>Ignore it, and move away.</td>
<td>You physically remove yourself from children who are teasing or bullying.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tell the bully to stop.</td>
<td>Standing up to bullies in a calm way lets them know that what they are trying to do is not working.</td>
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<td>Avoid high-risk places.</td>
<td>By keeping away from situations where bullying occurs, you can avoid the attention of bullies – as long as you are not missing out on activities because of this.</td>
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<td>Stay around other people.</td>
<td>It can help to have others around to protect you if you feel threatened.</td>
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<td>Ask other children for support.</td>
<td>Other children probably understand what you are going through and are likely to help you if needed. Bullies are less likely to strike if they can see that you have backup.</td>
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<td>Tell the teacher.</td>
<td>Your teacher will be able to help you deal with the problem, and will come up with a plan. The bully might not even know that the teacher is helping you.</td>
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It might also help your child to know why some children bully. The following suggestions for things to tell your child come from research on why children bully:

- ‘They are copying other people, and don’t know it’s wrong.’
- ‘They don’t know how to be nice to other people.’
- ‘They have a problem, and they think that making other people feel bad will make them feel better.’
- ‘They never learned how to say please or talk about problems.’
More to explore

- School-age Behaviour Toolkit
- About self-esteem: children 1-8 years
- Social anxiety in children
- Anxiety and fears

Web links

- Australian Government Department of Education – State and territory anti-bullying policies
- National Centre Against Bullying
- Bullying. No Way!
- Dealing with bullying - Bully blocking
- Safe Schools Hub For Parents

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