

## Frequently Asked Questions

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- ✦ Bullying Resource Center

### What is bullying?

Bullying involves the repeated exposure of one person to physical and/or relational aggression where the victim is hurt with teasing, name calling, mockery, threats, harassment, taunting, social exclusion or rumors.

Bullying can take many forms and occurs across the lifespan. It can occur in multiple settings including schools, "after school" programs, in the neighborhood, over the internet and cellular phones, at home between siblings, dating relationships, at summer camps and in organized athletic activities. Cyberbullying has added a new dimension to bullying because of the 24 hour access by way of social networks and texting.

Bullying is a common problem. In a large scale study of schools, reports of bullying range from 1 in 4 students report feeling excluded by peers and 1 in 10 students report being a victim of physical bullying.

All involved in bullying, including victims, bullies and bystanders, are at increased risk for mental health problems.

### Why is bullying such an important problem?

Bullying has far reaching effects on the victim, the bully, and the bystander.

Victims of bullying are at increased risk for depression, anxiety, health complaints, eating disorders, school absenteeism, running away, alcohol and drug abuse and self-injury, accidental injuries, poor school performance, and suicidal behaviors. They are also at risk for becoming a bully.

Bystanders are likely to feel guilt regarding inaction and may fear that their environment is unsafe. They may feel powerless or may be drawn to participate in

bullying. Bystanders are at increased risk for developing depression and anxiety problems, abuse drugs and alcohol, and miss school.

Bullies are at increased risk for getting into fights and committing crimes. They are more likely to abuse alcohol and drugs as a youth and to drop out from school. As an adult, those who have bullied are at increased risk to have criminal convictions and being abusive toward their romantic partners and children.

### Who gets bullied?

Any child regardless of age or gender has the potential to be bullied. However, certain populations are more vulnerable due to disability, sexual orientation, physical appearance, and numerous other factors including race, gender, income and religion.

### What are some warning signs that a child is being bullied?

Be observant for:

- Missing personal items
- Physical complaints hoping to stay home from school
- Changes in eating and sleeping habits
- A drop in grades
- Unhappiness regarding school or trouble over behavior
- Defensive over behavior and attitude

### What can I do if my child is being bullied?

Children and teens may not tell adults that they are being bullied because they are embarrassed or frightened. If you suspect your child has been bullied, here are some steps you can take:

- Allow your child to discuss what's going on with you or a trusted adult. Listening to his or her concerns is an easy way to provide emotional support.
- Seek help from your child's teacher or the school guidance counselor. Most bullying occurs on playgrounds, in lunchrooms, and bathrooms, on school buses or in unsupervised halls. Ask the school administrators to find out about programs other schools and communities have used to help combat bullying, such as peer mediation, conflict resolution, and anger management training, and increased adult supervision.
- Don't encourage your child to fight back. Instead, suggest that he or she try walking away to avoid the bully, or that they seek help from a teacher, coach, or other adult.
- Help your child practice what to say to the bully so he or she will be prepared the next time.

- Help your child practice being assertive. The simple act of insisting that the bully leave him alone may have a surprising effect. Explain to your child that the bully's true goal is to get a response.
- Encourage your child to be with friends when traveling back and forth from school, during shopping trips, or on other outings. Bullies are less likely to pick on a child in a group.
- Do not encourage your child to "work things out" on their own with a young bully, and avoid contacting the parents of students who have bullied your child. Instead, work with your child's school to ensure protection from bullying through adult supervision, consequences for young people who bully, and the school's clear message that bullying will be taken seriously.
- Explore bullying websites with your child online. Your child may be comforted by knowing that they are not alone and find additional ways to cope.

### What can I do if my child bullies others?

It is difficult for most parents to learn that their child may be bullying others. However, parents must recognize that children who bully are at risk for more serious behavior problems. Therefore, it is important for them to take immediate action. Here are some suggested approaches:

- Talk with your child. Offer a calm explanation of what your child is accused of, and ask for their account of the incident.
- Hold the young person fully accountable for their actions. Calmly but firmly tell your child that bullying will not be tolerated, and that their behaviors will be taken seriously.
- Develop clear rules and expectations for your child's behavior. Provide fair but consistent consequences if your child breaks the rules, and recognize and affirm appropriate behavior.
- Spend more time with your child. Carefully monitor their activities, including where and with whom they spend their time. Supervise their use of social networking sites and texting.
- Work with your child's school to ensure that your child is held accountable for his or her bullying behavior. Ask the school to keep you informed about any further incidents.
- Build on your child's strengths and positive attributes. Encourage them to become involved in social activities with positive role models.

### How can I best work with my child's school to address bullying?

- Support your school in evolving their policy regarding bullying. Legislation varies among States, but most States now require a specific anti-bullying policy, and many required (as of 2011) that this include responding to bullying events outside of school (such as cyber-bullying) that affect student interactions during the school day

- Adopt a position of "partnering" with your school. Accusing a school of not being responsive, or of allowing bullying, perpetuates conflicts (sometimes perceived by schools as "reverse bullying" by parents of bullied students). Instead, discuss with your school staff what would benefit your child and other students impacted by a bullying event.

What does NOT work:

- Putting bullies and victims in the same room to work out their differences in front of school staff is ineffective.
- It is absolutely necessary that schools clearly state that bullying won't be tolerated. However "no tolerance" policies ignore the fact that some teasing and unkind behavior to others is part of typical development. No tolerance policies may result in schools over reacting to certain events.
- Telling students to report events of bullying to school staff works poorly in middle/high school students.
- When teachers and administrators are the bullies. If administrators/teachers intimidate students, or tolerate hazing rituals, it's very difficult to develop an anti-bullying school climate.