Bullying: Information for Parents

Bullying is unwanted aggressive behavior by a person or group that targets another person or group. It involves an imbalance of power and is usually repeated over time. Bullying is not teasing. Bullying can start at age 3 or 4 and can continue into the teen age years. It happens to both boys and girls and may be done one on one or by groups of children against an individual. Bullying can happen anywhere.

Bullying may be physical, verbal, sexual or psychological. It may include:

- Negative or mean comments
- Leaving people out of activities
- Hitting, kicking, shoving, spitting or any other hurtful physical actions
- Lying or starting rumors about someone
- Taking things or damaging property
- Making fun of someone’s race, religion or sexual orientation.
- Using text, photo or video messaging, internet sites, social media (Facebook, Twitter), or cell phones in a hurtful way
- Making someone do something they do not want to do

There is often a power imbalance that is either real or thought to be real. Bullies use this power imbalance to intimidate their victims. Some bullies are stronger or bigger than those they bully, but they are not always.

Some bullies have lots of friends, and like to be in charge of others. Other bullies do not have many friends. The effects of bullying can be felt for a long time and can be very harmful and hurtful.
Signs That a Child is Being Bullied

- Damaged belongings or clothing
- Unexplained cuts, bruises and scratches
- Few, if any, friends
- Fear of going to school or being around friends or classmates
- Loss of interest in doing school work, or suddenly beginning to do poorly in school
- Not wanting to be with friends or family
- Changes in mood or constant crying
- Headaches, stomachaches, or other physical problems without a medical reason or cause
- Bad dreams and trouble sleeping
- Loss of appetite
- Thoughts of suicide

What to do if Your Child is Being Bullied

Tips for Talking with your Child:

It is important to talk to your child about bullying. Many children with learning or physical disabilities might not know that they are a victim of bullying. They might be afraid to tell an adult or have a hard time telling an adult because they have language delays. Explain to your child what bullying is and tell him or her that bullying is never OK. Your child should always tell an adult when bullying happens. Tell your child that reporting bullying to an adult is NOT tattling. Tattling is done to get someone in trouble - reporting is done to get help.

Talking to your child about his or her day is a good way to find out if there is bullying going on. When asking your child questions about the day, ask “open-ended questions.” These are questions that have to be answered with more information than just yes or no.

Here are some examples of open-ended questions:

- What did you learn in school today?
- Who did you play with at school?
- What do you think about the other children in your class?
- Does anyone get picked on or bullied?
- Who did you eat lunch with?
- How did your clothes get dirty or torn?
- What happened to your books, toys, phone, etc.?
- What nicknames do other children have for you?
If your child tells you he or she is being bullied, tell him that it is not his fault. Praise your child for telling you and tell him that you will help. (Picture 1)

Here are some other tips:

- Read books with your child about other children being bullied to create a “teachable time”. Use this time to help your child talk about being bullied or watching others being bullied.

- If you see some of the signs that your child is being bullied, talk to him or her about it. Tell him that he has a right to feel safe, and it is your job to help protect him. Remind him you need to know what is going on in his life so you can help him.

- Let your child know “It is always good to tell” if someone does something to hurt him or bother him.

- Teach your child who the “safe” adults are in his life. He or she should be able to talk to these people if he is being bullied.

- Role-play what your child can do or say if someone tries to bully him or someone else. It is best if he walks away and tells an adult. It is not a good idea for your child to physically fight back.

- Teach your child it is okay to ask an adult for help if he is being bullied. Your child does not have to handle it alone.

- Tell your child to use the “Buddy system” so he is not alone and has someone who can help him stay safe.

- Think about counseling or therapy for your child if you continue to see changes in his or her behavior and emotions that make you worried your child is being bullied.

- If you are concerned that your child might try to harm himself, please go to the closest Emergency Department for immediate evaluation.

**Picture 1:** Support your child.
Read books about bullying. Tell him he is safe and reassure him that you will help.
Tips for Talking with the School

You should contact school staff right away if your child is being bullied. Set up a meeting with the principal and your child’s teacher to talk about your worries.

- Write down what your child has told you about being bullied at school. Make sure you write down the “who, what, when and where” about what happened. Write down the facts; try not to write your opinions and feelings.
- Talk with your child’s principal, teacher, guidance counselor and coach. Tell them that your child is being bullied at school and when and where it seems to be happening. Write down what you said and what the staff said for your own records. Ask the school staff what they can do to help keep your child safe.
- Ask if there is a written policy about bullying, and if so, get a copy. Find out what is being done to prevent and stop bullying in your child’s school.
- If your child continues to be bullied, and it does not get better, take your concerns to the superintendent. Keep written records with dates stating what you have done and what the school has or has not done.
- Contact a hospital social worker for help if the bullying does not stop.

Bullying and Special Needs Children

Children with special needs may be bullied more than others because they seem different. Children with disabilities may bully others too.

Children with special health needs, such as seizures or food allergies, can be bullied. Bullying can include making fun of kids because of their allergies or giving them the things they are allergic to. In these cases, bullying is not just serious; it can mean life or death.

Your Child’s Rights under the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) and Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

The IEP (Individualized Education Program) is your child’s educational plan. The IEP can be very helpful in keeping your child safe. It can be written to give your child a better chance of success and to help stop bullying. The IEP should list what your child can do if he thinks he is being bullied. It should also list what the school will do to take care of the problem.

SPECIAL NOTE: When a child with special needs is bullied, it creates a hostile environment at school and bullying behavior becomes “disability harassment.” Under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, the law requires the school to address the bullying.
What to do if Your Child is the Bully

Your child might be bullying others if he or she:

- Gets into physical or verbal fights
- Has friends who bully others
- Gets sent to the principal’s office or to detention often
- Has unexplained extra money or new belongings
- Blames others for his problems
- Has difficulty following rules
- Views violence in a positive way

What you can do if your child is bullying others:

- Let your child know that bullying is not okay. Tell him what the consequences will be if he bullies others.
- Help your child learn ways to deal with frustration and anger that do not harm others.
- Look for times to “catch your child being good” and praise him or her.
- Help your child to understand how the child being bullied feels. You can do this by reading books about children who were bullied, or watching movies or videos where children were hurt by bullies. Ask your child how he thinks the child in the book, movie or video clip feels after being bullied.
- If the school contacts you about your child bullying, do your best to stay calm and avoid becoming angry and defensive. Focus on what you can do to help.
- Counseling or therapy may help your child stop bullying.
Bullying Resources

Buckeye Region Anti-Violence Organization, BRAVO (GLBTQI Services)
(866)862-7286
http://www.bravo-ohio.org/

Bullying in Schools

The Bully Project
http://specialneeds.thebullyproject.com

CAP4Kids
http://cap4kids.org/

HandsOn Central Ohio
211 or (614) 221-6766
http://www.handsoncentralohio.org/

Kids Health
http://www.kidshealth.org

National Bullying Prevention Center:

Ohio Dept. of Education: Office of Family and Community Support (877) 644-6338
http://www.ode.state.oh.us

U.S. Government Stop Bullying
www.StopBullying.Gov

Violence Prevention Works
http://www.violencepreventionworks.org/public/bullying-page

Wrightslaw
http://www.wrightslaw.com/info/harassment.index.htm

To learn more about Ohio’s Juvenile Protection Orders, please visit
http://www.supremecourtofohio.gov/JCS/domesticViolence/protection_forms/juvenileForms/FAQ.pdf

http://www.secretservice.gov/ntac_ssi.shtml

Contact numbers:

Nationwide Children's Hospital Social Work
(614) 722-2665

Nationwide Children's Hospital Behavioral Health
(614) 355-8080

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline
(800) 273-8255