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Helping Hand™

Health Education for Patients and Families

Bullying: Information for Parents

Bullying is unwanted aggressive behavior by a person or group that targets another person or group. There is often a power imbalance that is either real or thought to be real. Bullies use their power to control, frighten, or threaten their victims. They can do it once or, more often, repeat the behavior over and over.

Bullying, unlike teasing, always means there is intent to physically or emotionally hurt. It affects everyone, even the bullies.

Each child's response to bullying is different. The effects can be long-lasting and harmful. Bullying can lead to depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, and poor body image.

Bullying can be physical, verbal, or psychological (Picture 1). Examples are:

- negative or mean comments, name calling
- 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, sexual orientation, health needs, or the way they look
- “cyberbullying”- using text, photo or video messaging, social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, You Tube), or cell phones in a hurtful way
- making someone do something they do not want to do
- making threats or blackmailing



Source: Stopbullying.gov Preventing Weight-Based Bullying

Picture 1 Bullying can be physical, verbal, or psychological.

Signs that a child is being bullied

- clothing or things damaged
- unexplained cuts, bruises, and scratches

- few, if any, friends, changing groups of friends or not playing with old friends anymore
- withdrawing from friends and family
- fear of going to school or being around friends or classmates
- acting out or discipline problems at school
- refusing to participate in activities or to follow directions
- loss of interest in doing schoolwork or suddenly doing poorly in school (Picture 2)
- moodiness, crying, or emotional outbursts
- headaches, stomachaches, or physical problems without a medical reason or cause
- bad dreams and trouble sleeping
- loss of appetite
- thoughts of suicide



Source: <https://blog.ed.gov/2019/05/the-only-way-out-is-through/>

Picture 2 Children who are bullied can lose interest in school and refuse to participate in activities.

What to do if you think your child is being bullied

It is important to talk and carefully listen to your child. Ask “open-ended questions” that cannot be answered with just a “yes” or a “no” (Picture 3).

Some examples are:

- Whom did you play or eat lunch with at school?
- What do you think about the other children in your class?
- How did your clothes get dirty or torn?
- What happened to your books, toys, phone, etc.?
- What nicknames do other children have for you?
- What happens when someone you see is picked on or bullied?

For older children, you might ask:

- How do you and your friends work out problems with other people?
- What types of things do you and your friends share on social media?
- Tell me about the cliques at your school?



Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, National Institutes of Health, National Institute of Mental Health. (2015). Depression (NIH Publication No. 15-3561). Bethesda, MD: U.S. Government Printing Office.

Picture 3 Listen carefully to your child. Ask open-ended questions.

If you find out that your child is bullied:

- Give a clear message that bullying is never OK.
- Praise your child for telling you (Picture 4). Remind them that you need to know what is going on. It is your job to help and protect them.
- Tell them that it is not their fault and they have a right to feel safe.
- Explain that it is NOT tattling to tell if someone does something to hurt or bother them or another person. Tattling or snitching is done to get someone in trouble. Reporting is done to get help.
- Help your child to know who are the safe or trusted adults to go to (Picture 5).
- Tell them to avoid places, if they can, where the bullying happens. Do activities near adults and other groups of people. Bullies tend to not act out around adults.
- Tell your child to use the “buddy system” so they are not alone. There is often safety in numbers.

More useful tips:

- Read books or watch videos or movies about bullying with your child. Talk about how a person’s actions can affect others. This may help your child to be more open to talk about being bullied or know when others are bullied.
- Role-play (practice) what your child can do or say if someone tries to bully them or someone else. It is best to ignore the bully, walk away, and tell an adult. It is not a good idea to fight back physically or with words.
- Monitor your child’s social media activities and accounts. You can report cyberbullying to the computer experts (platform administrators) who manage the site. They can remove the content, block users, or delete accounts.
- If possible, try to contact the bully’s parents. They may not know what their child is doing.



Source: Center for Disease Control: A Comprehensive Technical Package for the Prevention of Youth Violence and Associated Risk Behaviors

Picture 4 Praise your child for telling you when they are bullied. Tell them that it is not their fault and they have a right to feel safe.



Source: Center for Disease Control: A Comprehensive Technical Package for the Prevention of Youth Violence and Associated Risk Behaviors

Picture 5 Help your child to know who are the safe or trusted adults to go to.

- Think about counseling or therapy for your child if you see changes in their behavior and emotions that worry you (Picture 6).
- If you feel that your child might try to harm themselves, go to the closest Emergency Department for immediate help.
- For threats of physical harm or violence, contact the police.



Source: [girlshealth.gov/Going to Therapy](https://girlshealth.gov/Going-to-Therapy)

Picture 6 Seeing a counselor can help.

A bully needs help and your attention right away.

If your child is the bully, they may be more likely to have problems handling conflict, get easily frustrated, not value others' opinions, break rules, or be depressed.

There is not a single type of bully (Picture 7). A bully may seem to have lots of friends. Often, they are overly concerned with being popular. Some may seem like “loners” rather than “joiners” and find it hard to make friends. Others may just feel left out.

Warning signs of a bully can be:

- gets into physical or verbal fights
- blames others for their problems
- has friends who bully others
- has difficulty following rules
- gets sent to the principal's office or to detention often
- has unexplained extra money or new things
- views violence in a positive way or thinks it is funny



Source: Source: Center for Disease Control: A Comprehensive Technical Package for the Prevention of Youth Violence and Associated Risk Behaviors

Picture 7 There is not a single type of bully.

What you can do:

- Explain what bullying is. Give a clear message that bullying is never OK.
- Do not be afraid to tell your child what the consequences will be if they bully others.
- Teach and model kindness and respect for different people and different ideas.
- Help your child to understand how it feels to be bullied. Read books or watch videos or movies with your child to show what bullying can look like. Talk about how a person's actions can affect others. Ask your child how they think the child in the book, video or movie feels after being bullied.

- Help them learn ways to deal with frustration and anger that do not harm others. Practice ways to act (role-playing) when they are upset. Teach your child to stop and think before doing something hurtful (Picture 8).
- Assure your child that they can change. Bullying is a choice.
- Look for times to “catch your child being good” and praise them. Spend time with them every day. Carefully listen and talk to them about their feelings and successes.
- If the school contacts you about your child’s bullying, do your best to stay calm and avoid becoming angry and defensive. Focus on what you can do to help. Your child can learn from the way that you act.
- Counseling or therapy may help your child learn to better handle their emotions.



Source: girlshealth.gov/friendships

Picture 8 If your child is the bully, practice ways with them to deal with frustration and anger that do not harm others.

Tips for talking with the school

Contact the school if your child is being bullied. Set up a meeting with the principal and teacher first (Picture 9). If needed, talk to the school counselor and coach.

- Write down the facts in advance- the who, what, when, and where the bullying happens. Try not to write your opinions and feelings.
- Take notes at your meeting. Keep your own records of what you tell the school and what they say they will do to help.
- Ask for a copy of the school’s written policy on bullying. Find out what is being done to prevent and stop bullying there.
- If your child continues to be bullied and it does not get better, the school’s policy should tell you where to go next for help.



Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, National Institutes of Health, National Institute of Mental Health. (2015). Depression (NIH Publication No. 15-3561). Bethesda, MD: U.S. Government Printing Office.

Picture 9 Set up a meeting with the principal and teacher. If needed, talk to the school counselor and coach.

Bullying and special needs children

Children with special learning or health needs may be bullied more than others because they seem different. Some may not know that they are a victim of bullying. Or, they might be afraid or have a hard time telling an adult due to language or other delays.

Bullying can include making fun of kids because of their health needs, such as giving the person something they are allergic to. In this case, bullying is not just serious; it can mean life or death.

When a child with special needs is bullied at school, the bullying behavior becomes “disability harassment.” Federal law, Under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, requires schools to address bullying with a written IEP (Individualized Education Program) plan. The IEP should describe what your child can do if they think they are being bullied and what the school will do to take care of the problem.

Bullying resources

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

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline
(800) 273-8255

American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) The Resilience Project
aap.org/en-us/advocacy-and-policy/aap-health-initiatives/resilience/Pages/Resilience-Project.aspx

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

The Bully Project, <http://specialneeds.thebullyproject.com>

CAP4Kids, <http://cap4kids.org/columbus> (Go to Resources by Area and Hotlines)

Kids Health www.kidshealth.org (search bullying)

National Bullying Prevention Center: <http://www.pacer.org/bullying/resources/info-facts.asp>

Nationwide Children's Hospital (NCH) It's Not Cool to Be Cruel, call or text (614) 355-0678, nationwidechildrens.org/its-not-cool-to-be-cruel

Ohio Dept. of Education: Office of Family and Community Support call or text (877) 644-6338
<http://www.ode.state.oh.us> (search bullying)

Safer Schools Ohio SaferOH Tip Line, call or text (844) 723-3764, saferschools.ohio.gov

Understanding Bullying and Cyberbullying, onlineschools.org/student-bullying-guide

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>