

# Bullying

Bullying is a common problem for school-aged children. All kids get picked on sometimes, but bullying that happens repeatedly can have a real impact on your child's life. There are things you, your child, and your child's school can do about bullying. Children who are bullies may have even greater problems and may need help in stopping their aggressive behavior.

## What is bullying?

Bullying is aggressive or hostile behavior that is repeated and intentional. Bullying happens when stronger kids pick on weaker kids. When it is severe and relentless, bullying can affect your child's school performance, self-esteem, and other areas of life.

The child who is doing the bullying has problems too. Bullying can be a sign of trouble at home or of emotional problems such as depression. Some of these kids may be bullied or abused themselves.

If your child is being bullied, the best thing he or she can do is avoid and ignore the bully as much as possible. If bullying becomes a frequent or severe problem, make sure your child knows to tell you, a teacher, or another trusted adult. Schools may also have methods to address the issue.

## What does it look like?

- Bullying can be physical (hitting, shoving, stealing) or verbal (taunting, threatening). Today, bullying can even take place on the Internet: in e-mail, instant messages, or chat rooms.
- The child who is being bullied may act passively—not standing up for himself or herself. Others may get angry or react in other ways that only encourage the bully.
- Your child may not tell you about the bullying. He or she may be embarrassed or may feel that telling an adult would be “tattling.” You may notice unexplained bruises, changes in mood or behavior, or missing articles of clothing or other belongings.
- Bullied children may be afraid to walk their usual route to school or go to the bus stop. They may seem depressed or anxious. Bullying sometimes contributes to problems with refusing to go to school.
- If your child has been bullying others, you may hear complaints from the school or from other parents. Parents of bullies are often unaware of their child's behavior.

## What causes bullying?

It's hard to say why some kids like to push others around. Some bullies have problems at home, while others are

bullied or abused themselves. Kids who are weaker or more vulnerable in some way make tempting targets for bullies.

## What are some possible complications of bullying?

- Being bullied may contribute to emotional problems in your child, for example, feelings of depression or anxiety. School performance and self-esteem may be affected. In severe cases, being bullied can really interfere with your child's daily activities.
- Bullying can be an early sign of more serious behavior problems. Kids who are bullies may be at increased risk of problems such as conduct disorders and drug or alcohol abuse, especially in later years.

## What increases your child's risk of bullying?

- Up to one fourth of kids say that they are bullied at least sometimes. Bullying is very common around age 8 or 9 but can occur in later years as well.
- Both boys and girls can be bullied. Boys are more likely to bully other kids in physical ways, whereas girls are more likely to be verbal bullies.
- Bullies tend to pick victims who are smaller, weaker, or more vulnerable. Shy children or those with few friends are more likely to be bullied.

## What can be done about bullying?

*If your child is being bullied:*

- Ask your child to tell you about the problem. Let your child know that he or she can discuss the problem honestly and that you are taking it seriously.
- *Don't* tell your child to fight back. *Do* tell him or her to ignore the bullying or avoid the bully as much as possible. He or she should walk away from the bully or ask for help from a teacher or other adult.
- Tell your child not to react to the bullying by getting angry, crying, or acting scared—that's just the kind of reaction the bully is trying to get. It may help just to say, “Leave me alone” and walk away.
- Talk to your child's teacher or school principal about the problem. More and more schools are realizing that bullying is an important problem that has to be dealt with. Many schools have started programs to monitor and prevent bullying and aggressive behavior.
- It may help to talk to the parents of the child who is doing the bullying. Often they are unaware that their child is acting like a bully.

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*If your child is a bully:*

- It is important to get help for the children who are bullies. Bullying can be a sign of problems at home or an early sign of more serious behavior problems.

### **When should I call your office?**

Call our office if:

- Your child is having frequent feelings of depression or anxiety or if he or she refuses to go to school.
- You need help dealing with a serious bullying problem.
- Your child has been bullying other children or engaging in other types of aggressive or hostile behavior (such as fighting or stealing).