

ACTION STEPS FOR PARENTS ADDRESSING BULLYING

Prior to talking to your child about bullying, make sure that you have an accurate understanding of the definition of bullying. There are several components of bullying and all must be met for the behavior to be considered bullying. Keep in mind that not all negative behavior (albeit inappropriate and worthy of addressing) is bullying.

Ask yourself:

1. Was there *intent* to harm (physically, emotionally or socially)?
2. Was there an *imbalance of power*? (one-way interaction, the student has a higher social status, is physically larger, or emotionally intimidating)
3. Was the behavior *repeated* over time?
4. Does the behavior create a *hostile school environment* for the targeted student? (reasonable fear for self or property; substantially detrimental effect on physical or mental health; substantially interferes with academic performance; or substantially interferes with ability to participate in or benefit from the services, activities, and privileges provided by the school)

The following tips are from PACER CENTER's [Beyond Sticks and Stones, How to Help Your Child Address Bullying](#).

Talk with Your Child about Bullying

When you discover your child is being bullied, you may feel a variety of emotions. These reactions and emotional responses are natural for parents who want their child to feel valued, protected, and loved. In order to become an effective advocate for your child, it is important for you to recognize and acknowledge your child's reactions, focusing on the issue, not the emotion. Parents must move away from thinking, "Why did this happen to my child?" to developing an action plan. Your approach, attitude, and responses will impact your child and those you work with to intervene against the bullying behavior.

Parents should be ready to:

- Listen. It is your child's story; let your child tell it. If your child is telling you, he or she needs your help.
- Believe. The knowledge that your child is being bullied can be emotionally painful. To be an effective advocate, you need to react in a way that encourages your child to trust you.
- Be supportive. Tell your child, "It is not your fault. You do not deserve to be bullied." Try to empower your child. Avoid judgmental comments about your child or the child who bullies.
- Be Patient. Children may not be ready to open up right away. Talking about the bullying may be difficult, as they may fear retaliation from the bully or believe that even if they tell an adult, nothing will change. Your child might be feeling insecure, withdrawn, frightened, or ashamed.
- Provide information. Educate your child about bullying by providing information at a level your child can understand.
- Explore options for intervention strategies. You can talk with your child about the options for dealing with the bullying behavior.
- Affirm your child. Provide the message that the child is not alone. Bullying happens to a lot of kids, but that never makes it right. All students have the right to be safe at school. There are people who care and we need to work together.

Encourage Children to Be Helpful Bystanders

Most bystanders passively accept bullying by watching and doing nothing. Often, without realizing it, these bystanders contribute to the problem by providing the audience a bully craves, and the silent acceptance that allows bullies to continue their hurtful behavior.

Encourage all children to:

- be inclusive, empathetic, and compassionate
- treat others with respect
- not laugh, cheer, or make comments that feed the bullying
- discourage bullying by defending a victim and/or redirecting the situation
- tell an adult when they witness someone being mistreated

Take Action if Your Child is Exhibiting Bullying Behaviors

What if your child is the bully? First of all, know that education makes a difference. Your child may not realize how much he or she is harming someone, or may not label the behavior as bullying. Taking the following steps can help guide your child to more appropriate behavior.

1. Talk with your child. Find out why he or she is bullying others. You might explore how your child is feeling about him- or herself, ask if he or she is being bullied, and invite discussion about bullying. Find out if your child's friends are also bullying. Ask how you can help.
2. Teach empathy, respect, and compassion. Often, children who bully lack awareness of how it impacts others. Try to understand your child's feelings, and help your child understand how others feel when they are bullied. Remind your child that everyone has feeling, that other people's feelings matter and deserve respect.
3. Make your expectations clear. Let your child know that bullying is not okay under any circumstances, and that you will not tolerate it. Take immediate action if you learn that he or she is involved in a bullying incident.
4. Provide clear, consistent consequences for bullying. Be specific about what will happen if the bullying continues.
5. Teach by example. Model nonviolent behavior and encourage cooperative play. Help your child learn different ways to resolve conflict and deal with feelings such as anger, insecurity or frustration. Teach and reward appropriate behavior.
6. Role play. Help your child practice different ways to handle situations. You can take turns playing the part of the child who does the bullying and the one who is being bullied. By doing this, you will help your child understand what it's like to be in the other person's shoes.
7. Provide positive feedback. When your child handles conflict well, shows compassion for others, or finds a positive way to deal with feelings, offer praise and recognition. Positive reinforcement can improve behavior and is more effective than punishment.
8. Be realistic. It takes time to change behavior. Be patient as your child learns new ways of handling feelings and conflict. Keep your love and support visible.
9. Seek help. Reach out to your child's teacher, school principal, guidance counselor, or bully prevention coordinator. These professionals can help you and your child learn how to understand and deal with bullying behavior. Parents can play a significant role in stopping the behavior, and the rewards will be significant for all.