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# Bullying Newsletter

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## What is Bullying?

Bullying among children is aggressive behavior that is intentional and involves an imbalance of power or strength. A child who is bullied has a hard time defending himself or herself. Usually, bullying is repeated over time. Bullying can take many forms, such as: hitting or punching (physical bullying); teasing or name-

calling (verbal bullying); intimidation through gestures or social exclusion (emotional bullying); and sending insulting messages by phone or computer email (cyber bullying). Children with disabilities may be at a higher risk of being bullied than other children.

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### Special points of interest:

- ☺ What Is Bullying?
- ☺ Warning Signs of Bullying
- ☺ What to do if Your Child is being Bullied
- ☺ Reporting Bullying to Parents
- ☺ Help Your Child become more Resilient to Bullying
- ☺ Is Bullying Part of Growing UP?

## Warning Signs of Bullying

Possible warning signs that a child is being bullied:

- Comes home with torn, damaged, or missing pieces of clothing, books, or other belongings
- Has unexplained cuts, bruises, and scratches
- Has few, if any, friends with whom he or she spends time
- Seems afraid of going to school, walking to and from school, riding the school bus, or taking part in organized activities with peers (such as clubs)
- Takes a long, "illogical" route when walking to or from school
- Has lost interest in school work or suddenly begins to do poorly in school
- Appears sad, moody, teary, or depressed when she or he comes home
- Complains frequently of headaches, stomachaches, or other physical ailments
- Has trouble sleeping or frequent bad dreams
- Experiences a loss of appetite
- Appears anxious and/or suffers from low self-esteem



# What to do if You *Suspect* that Your Child is being Bullied...

If your child shows any of these signs, this does not necessarily mean that she or he is being bullied, but it is a possibility worth exploring. What should you do? Talk with your child *and* talk with staff at school to learn more.

## 1. *Talk with your child.*

Tell your child that you are concerned about him or her and that you would like to help. Here are some questions that can get the discussion going:

Some direct questions:

- "I'm worried about you. Are there any kids at school who may be picking on you or bullying you?"
- "Are there any kids at school who tease you in a mean way?"
- "Are there any kids at school who leave you out or exclude you on purpose?"

Some more subtle questions:

- "Do you have any special friends at school this year? Who are they? Who do you hang out with?"
- "Who do you sit with at lunch/on the bus?"
- "Are there any kids at school who you really don't like? Why don't you like them? Do they ever pick on you or leave you out of things?"

## Reporting Bullying to Parents

Children frequently do not tell their parents that they are being bullied because they are embarrassed, ashamed, frightened of the children who are bullying them, or afraid of being seen as a "tattler". If your child tells you about being bullied, it has taken a lot of courage to do so. Your child needs your help to stop the bullying.

## 2. *Talk with staff at your child's school.*

Talk with your child's teacher. He or she will understand the relationships between your child and other peers at school. Share your concerns about your child and ask the teacher such questions as:

- "How does my child get along with other students in his/her class?"
- "With whom does she/he spend free time?"
- "Have you ever noticed, or have you ever suspected that my child is ever bullied by other students?" Give examples of some ways that children can be bullied to be sure that the teacher is not only focusing on one kind of bullying (such as physical bullying)
- Ask the teacher to talk with other adults who interact with your child at school (such as music teacher, physical education teacher or bus driver) to see if they have observed students bullying your child.

If you are not comfortable talking with your child's teacher, or if you are not satisfied with the conversation, make an appointment to meet with your child's guidance counselor and/or school principal to discuss your concerns.

If you obtain information from your child or from staff at your child's school that leads you to believe that he or she is being bullied, take quick action. Bullying can have serious effects on children.

If, after talking with your child and school staff, you *don't* suspect that your child is being bullied,

stay vigilant to other possible problems that your child may be having. A number of the warning signs may be signs of other serious problems. Share your concerns with a counselor at your child's school.



# What to do if Your Child is being Bullied...

## *First, focus on your child. Be supportive and gather information about the bullying*

- Never tell your child to ignore the bullying. What the child may "hear" is that *you* are going to ignore it. If the child were able to simply ignore it, it is likely that he or she would not have told you about it. Often, ignoring bullying allows it to become more serious.
- Don't blame the child who is being bullied. Don't assume that your child did something to provoke the bullying. Don't say, "What did you do to aggravate the other child?"
- Listen carefully to what your child tells you about the bullying. Ask him/her to describe who was involved and how and where each bullying episode happened.
- Learn as much as you can about the bullying tactics being used. Can your child name other children or adults who may have witnessed the bullying?
- Empathize with your child. Tell him/her that bullying is wrong, not their fault, and that you are glad that he/she had the courage to tell you about it. Ask your child what he/she thinks can be done to help. Assure him/her that you will work together to find a solution.
- If you disagree with how your child handled the bullying situation, don't criticize him/her.
- Don't encourage physical retaliation ("just hit



them back") as a solution. Hitting another student is not likely to end the problem, and it could get your child suspended or expelled, or escalate the situation.

- Check your emotions. A parent's protective instincts stir strong emotions. Although it is difficult, a parent is wise to step back and consider the next steps carefully.

## *Second, contact your child's teacher and/or principal*

- Parents are often reluctant to report bullying to school officials, but bullying may not stop without the help of adults.
- Keep your emotions in check. Give factual information about your child's experience of being bullied—who, what, where, when, and how.
- Emphasize that you want to work with the staff at the school to find a solution to stop the bullying, for the sake of your child as well as other students.
- Do not contact the parents of the student(s) who bullied your child. This is usually a parent's first response, but sometimes it makes matters worse. School officials should contact the parents of the child or children who did the bullying.
- Expect the bullying to stop. Talk regularly with your child and with the school staff to see if the bullying has stopped. If the bullying persists, contact school authorities again.

## **Elizabeth Buffum Chace Center**

**Serving Families Affected by Domestic Violence**

**24-Hour Information and Referral Crisis Hotline: 738-1700**

**Outreach and Education Advocate, Erika Cannon: [erikac@ebchouse.org](mailto:erikac@ebchouse.org)**

# Help your Child become more Resilient to Bullying



- Help to develop talents or positive attributes of your child. Suggest and facilitate music, athletics, and art activities. Doing so may help your child be more confident among his/her peers.
- Encourage your child to make contact with friendly students in his class. Your child's teacher may be able to suggest students with whom your child can make friends, spend time, or collaborate on work.
- Help your child meet new friends outside of the school environment. A new environment can provide a "fresh start" for a child who has been bullied repeatedly.
- Teach your child safety strategies. Teach him/her how to seek help from an adult when he/she feels threatened by a bully. Talk about whom he/she should go to for help and role-play what she/he should say. Assure your child that reporting bullying is not the same as tattling.
- Ask yourself: Is my child being bullied because of a learning difficulty or a lack of social skills? If your child is hyperactive, impulsive or overly talkative, the child who bullies may be reacting out of annoyance. This does not make the bullying right, but it may help to explain why your child is being targeted. If your child easily irritates people, seek help from a counselor so that your child can better learn the informal social rules of his/her peer group.
- Home is where the heart is. Make sure your child has a safe and loving home environment where he/she can take shelter, physically and emotionally. Always keep the lines of communication open.



## Isn't Bullying Just Part of Growing Up?

Perhaps this attitude is why bullying is still common in American schools. There is a lot of research that shows that being a victim of bullying can affect students' self-esteem and how they approach school (Jovonen & Graham, 2001). Students who are often bullied by other students may have serious levels of depression and anxiety, and they are more likely than other students to think about suicide (Austin & Joseph, 1996; Grills & Ollendick, 2002). Victims of bullying are also more likely than other students to report that they do not want to go to school because of fear of being bullied. Some children who are bullied decide, in

turn, to bully others. For all of these reasons, it is important that we address the bullying problem in our children's schools. In addition, because many children (particularly boys and older children) do not tell their parents or adults at school about being bullied, it is important that parents are vigilant to possible signs of bullying.

