



Tips for Parents on Bullying



If you're a parent concerned about bullying, it's important to recognize the signs that a child is a bully, as well as the signs of one who is being victimized. This is especially true if your child has a learning disability (LD), Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (AD/HD), Autism, or any condition or component of their personal make-up which might make them more likely to be targeted for bullying. **Being alert and observant is critical, since victims are often reluctant to report bullying.** Many victims don't report it to their parents or teachers because they're embarrassed or humiliated by the bullying. They may assume that adults will accuse them of tattling or will tell them to deal with it themselves. Some victims believe there is nothing adults can do to get the bully to stop. Naturally, bullies don't discuss their misdeeds with their parents or teachers. If their bullying behavior is reported and their parents confront them, bullies usually deny their involvement.

It is critical that parents, students, and school officials understand the differences between bullying and other forms of peer conflict. The essential components of bullying are an imbalance of power (e.g. size, age, social status, or numbers) and intent to cause harm (physical, social, or emotional). Most bullying will also involve a repeated pattern of behavior, but it is not necessary to establish this, in order to meet the definition of bullying. In this age of technology, the imbalance of power may not exist at the time rumors or other attempts at social isolation are made through any electronic device. This still may meet the criteria of bullying, and if it's found to interfere with the educational opportunity of any child, or disrupt the academic environment of a school, we can and will take any action necessary to stop the problem.

The Victim: Signs and Symptoms

A child who is a victim of bullying may display one or more of the following behaviors at home*:

- Comes home from school with clothing that's torn or in disarray, or with damaged books.
- Has bruises, cuts, and scratches, but can't give a logical explanation for how they got them.
- Appears afraid or reluctant to go to school in the morning, complaining repeatedly of headaches or stomach pains.
- Chooses an "illogical" route for going to and from school.
- Has bad dreams or cries in their sleep.

- Loses interest in school work, and grades suffer. If your child normally struggles in school because of a learning disability and is teased about having LD, school may become unbearable for them.
- Appears sad or depressed, or shows unexpected mood shifts, irritability, and sudden outbursts of temper.
- Requests money from you to meet the bully's demands and might even resort to stealing money from you or other family members.
- Seems socially isolated, with few — if any — real friends; is rarely invited to parties or to the homes of other kids. Their fear of rejection may lead them to shun others.

The Bully: Signs and Symptoms

A youngster who is bullying other kids may display one or more of the following behaviors at home*:

- Has a strong need to dominate and subdue others; asserts with power and threats to get their own way.
- Intimidates siblings or kids in the neighborhood.
- Brags about actual or imagined superiority over other kids.
- Is hot-tempered, easily angered, impulsive, and has low frustration tolerance. Has difficulty conforming to rules and tolerating adversities and delays. If they have the impulsive/hyperactive type of AD/HD, that could explain some of these behaviors; if so, it's important to work with their doctor and teachers to address and manage such behaviors.
- Cheating
- Oppositional, defiant, and aggressive behavior toward adults, including teachers and parents.
- Antisocial or criminal behavior (such as stealing or vandalism), often at a relatively early age. They may hang out with the "wrong crowd."

* Adapted from *Bullying at School*

What can parents of the victim do?

If you know or suspect your child is being bullied, but the school hasn't communicated with you about the situation, you should contact your child's teacher(s) or the school's bullying Point of Contact right away. Keep in mind that your primary goal should be to get the school's cooperation to get the bullying to stop. **Knowing your own child is being victimized can evoke strong feelings, but you'll get much more cooperation from school personnel if you can stick to the facts without becoming overly emotional.** While you may want assurance that everyone involved is punished severely, try to focus on putting an end to the bullying!

If your child is a victim of bullying, try helping them with the following strategies:

Your Attitude and Actions

- Listen carefully to your child's reports of being bullied. Be sympathetic and take the problem seriously. Be careful not to overreact or under-react.
- Do not blame the victim. When a child or teen finally works up the courage to report bullying, it isn't appropriate to criticize them for causing it or not handling the situation correctly. For example, don't ask, "Well, what did you do to bring it on?"
- Realize that for a child who is being bullied, home is their refuge. Expect them to have some difficult times in dealing with victimization. Get professional help if you think your child needs it.
- Encourage your child to keep talking to you. Spend extra time with them. Provide constant support and encouragement, and tell them that you love them often!

Teaching Your Child Safety Strategies

- Remember that hitting back is not a choice at school and shouldn't be encouraged. In Manatee County schools, we have a "zero tolerance policy" for physical aggression; encouraging your child to hit back may just get them suspended or even expelled.
- Teach your child the 3 C's of dealing with bullies. They need to remain Cool, Calm, and Confident. Look the bully in the eye (or forehead, if they have difficulty establishing eye contact) with a non-threatening smile, and tell them to stop. The most important advice is **Don't Feed the Bully** – that is – no negative reaction, which will encourage the bully(ies) to continue their behavior. Teach your child to be assertive; not aggressive or passive in their response.
- Encourage your child to walk away and report to an adult if they feel someone is about to hurt them.
- Talk about safe ways to act in situations that might be dangerous. For example, identify a "safe house" or store or where they can find sanctuary if pursued by bullies. Encourage them to walk with an adult or older child. Give them a telephone number of an available adult to call if he's afraid and needs help dealing with a bullying situation.
- Teach your child how to report bullying incidents to adults in an effective way. Adults are less likely to discount a child's report as "tattling" if the report includes:
 - ✓ What is being done to them that makes them fearful or uncomfortable
 - ✓ Who is doing it
 - ✓ What they have done to try to resolve the problem or to get the bully to quit
 - ✓ A clear explanation of what they need from the adult (or what they want the adult to do) to get the bully to quit.
- If possible, students should also avoid reporting the incident right in front of the bully or immediately following the incident, without first trying to stop it

themselves. As long as the bullying isn't endangering your child, it's best done privately in a one-on-one setting (or with other supportive students).

- Bullying should be reported when being assertive doesn't work (and the bullying persists) or when the bullying is perceived as threatening or dangerous.
- Brainstorm and practice strategies with your child to avoid further victimization.

Nurturing your child's self-esteem

- Educate your child about bullying and bullies. Help them put the problem in perspective and not take it personally.
- Teach your child how to walk in a confident manner.
- If needed, help them pay particular attention to personal grooming and social skills.
- Identify and encourage your child's talents and positive attributes; doing so may help them better assert themselves among their peers.
- Encourage your child to make new friends. A new environment can provide a "new chance" for a victimized student, as they won't be subjected to the negative stereotype other classmates have of them. **Encourage them to make contact with calm and friendly students in their school.** Such action may require some assistance on your part, or perhaps a school mental health professional, to develop the child's skills at initiating contact and maintaining a friendship relationship. This is especially true if your child's learning problems make their social interactions difficult. Be sure to provide ongoing support and encouragement, because your child, due to earlier failures, will tend to give up in the face of even slight adversities.
- Encourage your child to participate in physical training or sports, even if they are reluctant. Physical exercise can result in better physical coordination and less body anxiety, which, in turn, is likely to increase self-confidence and improve peer relationships.

When should the victim's parents contact school authorities?

If the bullying occurs at school, then the main responsibility for achieving this goal lies with the school officials. It's important, however, that the parents of the victim collaborate with the school to implement an agreed-upon plan for solving the problem. Remember to approach schools as a partner, rather than blaming them for the situation.

If your child has been the victim of bullying at school, here are some suggestions for reporting the problem to school authorities:

- After talking to your child, but before contacting school personnel, write down the details of the bullying situations reported to you by your child. Note the dates and the names of the students involved. Try to view the situation objectively and determine how serious it is.

- Your child may resist your involvement if they fear retaliation by the bully. If so, explain to your child that once they've started, most bullying situations require adult intervention to resolve the problem. Let them know exactly who you plan to talk to.
- Contact school personnel for assistance in ending the bullying. First share the problem with your child's teacher(s), and work together to decide how to approach the problem. If the teacher isn't able to get the bullying under control or if it has already escalated to a more serious level, go to the principal or the school's bullying point of contact and make a formal request that they get the bullying to stop. Putting this request in writing will also help your cause.
- Do not contact the bully or the bully's family directly.
- Keep an ongoing log of the dates of any further bullying incidents and the actions you take to help your child deal with the bullying. Inform the school of ongoing bullying incidents. **Do not assume they know, or should know the bullying is continuing.** This is mainly a clandestine behavior and schools are large places with different issues that see students in crisis daily. If the lines of communication are not kept open by the bullied student, the staff may not realize a problem is continuing, despite keeping a close eye on all involved parties.

What can the parents of the bully do?

Parents of bullies should understand that children who aggressively bully peers are at increased risk for engaging in antisocial or criminal behavior in the future. It is therefore important to try to help bullies change their negative attitudes and behavior toward others.

Your Attitude and Actions

- Take the problem seriously. Resist a tendency to deny the problem or to discount the seriousness of it. Avoid denial thinking such as "Boys will be boys," or "Bullying is just a natural part of growing up."
- Listen carefully and check out the facts. Do not automatically believe everything your child tells you. Children who bully are good at manipulating adults and can be very artful at weaving a story that makes them look innocent.
- The school or the victim's parents may be documenting reports of your child's bullying behaviors. It doesn't serve your child well to deny their involvement if there is evidence to the contrary. Check out the dates and the activities and determine if there is a pattern in their bullying behavior.
- Explore the reasons for your child's negative behavior. Get professional help if necessary for your child and/or your family.

Holding the Bully Accountable

- Resist the tendency to blame yourself if you have clear rules which do not allow this behavior and you model those rules yourself. Hold your child responsible for their own choices.
- Make it clear to your child that you take bullying seriously, and that you will not tolerate such behavior in the future. Make it clear that you expect all bullying activities to stop immediately.
- The issue of bullying should be monitored for some time through questioning your child and regularly contacting the school to determine if their bullying behavior has stopped.

Helping a Bully Change Behavior

- Develop a clear and simple system of family rules. Offer frequent praise and reinforcement. Use non-hostile, negative consequences for violations of rule-following behavior. Consistently enforce the rules. Appropriate consequences for bullying might include the loss of privileges (e.g., television or computer game time).
- Follow through with appropriate consequences for your child's misbehavior. Do not use physical punishment, as doing so will only reinforce your child's mistaken belief that it's acceptable to bully those who are weaker to get what one wants. **If both you and the school are consistent in applying consequences for bullying, the chances of a behavioral change are considerably increased.**
- Spend more time with your child and monitor their activities closely. Find out who their friends are, where they spend their leisure time, and what activities they usually engage in. Is your child in "bad company"? If so, limit their exposure to the negative peer group and provide opportunities to become involved with more pro-social peers.
- Build on your child's talents and strengths, and help them develop less aggressive and more empathetic reaction patterns.
- Reward your child for positive, caring actions and for peaceful problem solving.

What can — and should — parents expect the school to do?

Whether your child is a bully, victim, or bystander, you should expect the following from their school:

- School administrators, teachers, and staff should take bullying problems seriously. The school should investigate the situation and let you know what steps they're taking to help stop the bullying. Not all consequences or interventions regarding other students may be revealed to you, due to privacy issues.
- Written school policies and rules against bullying, harassment, and intimidation should be in place — and be enforced. Schools should have expectations and reporting procedures posted in visible areas.

- Schools should have an escalating system of interventions and consequences that are based on best practices or scientific evidence.
- Teachers and/or administrators should speak to the bully and their parents and apply any necessary interventions. They should also tell them what future consequences will be if they do not stop bullying others. If the bullying continues, the school should enforce the pre-determined consequences immediately.
- Teachers and administrators should have adult supervision in the areas of the school campus where bullying incidents are most likely to occur.
- School personnel should be trained in how to handle bullying situations when they are confronted with them or reported to them.
- School personnel should be well-informed about the children who are being victimized by bullies so they can monitor and provide support to the victims as needed. They should also communicate with the victims' parents to tell them how the situation is being handled at school.

Finally, be aware that bullying prevention programs in schools are often a very effective way to stop bullying.

Building a Bully-free Future

Even though bullying has existed in schools since schools have existed, that is no excuse to continue to allow children to be bullied. Researchers have gained new understanding of the dynamics of bullying and the roles of all those involved. **The long-term negative outcomes of children who are bullied are too serious to ignore.** For example, the CIA has reported that fully two-thirds of recent school shooting incidents in the United States were committed by youth who had experienced severe bullying by their classmates.

Parents and teachers hold the power to work together to put an end to bullying and provide a safe learning environment for all children. **In many cases, it will be the parent who must take charge of bringing the bullying incidents to the attention of school authorities.** Parents should expect full cooperation from the school to resolve the problem. The result of reducing bullying in our schools is an improved school environment that is friendly and welcoming to all students. In schools where children feel protected from bullying, they are free to spend their days learning, building friendships, and dreaming about all the possibilities for their lives.



THE BULLY VACCINE CHEAT SHEET

HOW TO RESPOND TO ANY TYPE OF BULLYING

This material is taken from my book: The Bully Vaccine (<http://thebullyvaccine.com>). It is designed to act as a summary of the key points of the book and to provide step-by-step examples of how the techniques taught in the book can be implemented to deal with any sort of bully.

From an operant conditioning standpoint, the key to training your bully to no longer bully you is to decrease the reward the bully receives from their efforts and to increase the cost associated with their undesirable behavior. Once they realize the cost has become too high and the reward non-existent, they will stop.

TEASING

WHAT TO DO: Look the bully straight in the eye and say “Thank you very much for that information. It’s very helpful” in as bored a voice as you can manage. Practice this so you can say it automatically.

WHEN TO DO IT: Every single time someone says something mean. No exceptions.

WHY DO IT: A bully gets a kick out of seeing you respond emotionally. By depriving them of that reward, you decrease their desire to tease. Responding to them this way every single time also decreases their desire to tease.

OTHER BENEFITS: Bullies are looking for victims they can intimidate. Staring them straight in the eye tells them that you are not afraid of them and that they don’t intimidate you, making you a less than ideal target.

What will the bully do in response: If the teasing is new, they will just look at you funny. They may try to tease you again but if you respond this way every time, they will give up pretty quickly. If the teasing has been going on a while, they may escalate their behavior and threaten you with violence. This is to be expected. Remain calm and continue to respond to every single mean thing that is said as planned. If you are consistent and refuse to be intimidated you will get the teasing to stop.

THREATENED VIOLENCE

WHAT TO DO: Look the bully straight in the eye and calmly inform them that if they hit you or do anything violent to you at all that you will report them to an appropriate adult.

WHEN TO DO IT: Every single time you are threatened. No exceptions. Again, consistency is the key to getting this behavior to stop.

WHY TO DO IT: First: physical attacks of any sort are not to be tolerated and must be reported. Second: by telling them that you will report them, you are informing them that there will be punished if they carry through on their threat. This increases the cost of their bad behavior. Third, by remaining calm and looking them straight in the eye, you are decreasing the reward. You are not intimidated by them and threatening you isn't enough to provoke the response they were hoping for. If they continue, they are going to get in trouble. In other words, you have just told the bully that you aren't worth the effort.

OTHER BENEFITS: Again, most bullying is about intimidation. Bullies are looking for people they can scare into obedience. By refusing to be intimidated by them you are making yourself unattractive to them and by raising the possibility of negative consequences, you increase the cost and decrease their desire to bully you.

WHAT TO EXPECT: Most bullies who are threatening violence are not yet at the stage where they are willing to escalate to actual violence, especially if they believe you are serious about reporting them. Most will not be willing to carry through on their threat of violence and will de-escalate, either by leaving you alone or by resorting to name-calling and teasing. If they do that then respond to the teasing accordingly. There is, however, a possibility that they will escalate and carry through on the threat of violent assault. If that happen, defend yourself as best as possible and report them immediately.

ADDITIONAL TIP: If someone challenges you to a fight, do not take the bait. Do not meet them somewhere and give them access to hurt you. If they call you chicken, respond with your planned teasing strategy. Again, do not allow them to intimidate you into doing what they want you to.

RESPONDING TO ACTUAL VIOLENCE

WHAT TO DO: Defend yourself in the moment, and get yourself to safety as quickly as possible. And then, report them.

WHEN TO DO IT: Every single time you are hit, tripped, slammed into a locker, or have something stolen. Report it every time, no exceptions.

WHY TO DO IT: In order to get violent behavior to stop, you must increase the cost of committing violence. And to do that, you need to ensure that the bully receives a negative consequence for their behavior every single time. Do not allow them to get away with even a single minor incident. Report them every time, no exceptions.

WHAT TO EXPECT: If bullying has escalated to physical violence, it means your bully is already very invested in bullying you because they are willing to take a risk of getting in trouble or getting hurt themselves every time they engage in a violent act with you. Which means, when you start reporting them, they are going to do what's called a blowout. In layman terms this mean, they are going to get more violent for a period of time before they finally give up. I realize this isn't ideal but you don't have any good choices left. You are already being physically attacked. You can either allow that to continue and have it escalate on its own time, or you can provoke a blowout and get it to stop by reporting each and every incidence of violence until it stops. What you want your bully to learn is that the cost of bullying you is too high to continue and the only way for them to learn this lesson is to report them every single time.

CYBERBULLYING

WHAT TO DO: Don't respond. Don't send a rebuttal. Act as though you never saw whatever it is that was posted or that you never received the email. You want your cyberbully to think that you are too busy to be bothered by their nonsense. In fact, once you realize someone is cyberbullying you, I would just put them in my trash rules to prevent myself from reading their nonsense. Feel free to block them or defriend them so that you truly won't be bothered by them. Don't fall into the trap of becoming obsessed with what is being said. The sooner you stop paying attention to them for real, the sooner they will stop. I realize this is hard to do, but the less you are exposed to this negativity the better and you do have the power to block people out in the cyberworld. Use the tools to block them and if something gets through do not respond. You want your cyberbully to think that their obnoxiousness was lost in the ether or that you just couldn't be bothered to respond. Cyberbullies, just like regular bullies, are looking to get a response out of you. If you don't respond they will get bored and move on.

WHEN TO DO IT: Every single time someone posts something mean about you or tries to get your goat using electronic tools (cellphones, texting, online posts, whatever). Every time someone tells you that someone else posted something mean about you, respond with a bored, whatever. Every time you are asked whether something someone posted about you is true or not, say no, and that what that person did is pretty stupid and move on to a more interesting topic. You need to do this every time. Again, it's the consistency that is going to make this obnoxious behavior stop.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN CYBERBULLYING AND CYBERSTALKING: If you are being cyberstalked and not just cyberbullied, you need to consider taking legal action. Cyberbullying is when someone uses electronic media to threatening your livelihood or your safety. Take such threats seriously and report them just as you would an assault and/or a battery.

WHY TO DO IT: The ideal way to respond to a bully is to not respond at all. The great thing about cyberbullying is that as long as you can control your emotional response and you are willing to block your bullies from your view, you can easily not respond. If you need to totally disconnect, do it. Believe it or not, you will survive being disconnected. It really doesn't matter if people are saying mean things about you online. The people that matter won't believe it and the people who do are idiots. I've been cyberstalked and I don't respond and almost inevitably people will come to my defense for me. The less you respond, the less the cyberbully will be able to feed their habit and justify their poor treatment of you. Don't feed the beast.

WHAT TO EXPECT: When a cyberbully doesn't get your attention through whatever venue they have chosen to harass you through, expect them to encourage other people to ask you about their harassment. This is the bully's way of checking to see if you got their harassing message. Say no and then tell the person you don't care and don't need to know what they said about you. The bully may try other ways to get your attention using both live and electronic message carriers. Just as in other forms, when you refuse to give them their reward, they will up their game in an attempt to get you to respond. This is why disconnecting and refusing to play their online harassment game is so essential. Don't respond to the intermediaries they send to make sure you got their message. Your attitude must be, they are an idiot spreading lies and they aren't worth your time, because they aren't.

DEFENDING SOMEONE ELSE

WHAT TO DO: if you witness someone else being bullied – look the bully straight in the eye and politely tell them to stop. If it is teasing, tell them what they said isn't nice and they should apologize. If it is threatening violence, tell them their behavior isn't acceptable and that if they act on their threat you will report them. If the bully continues despite your request that they stop, report them. If you witness violence against another student, find an adult immediately and ask them to intervene.

WHEN TO DO IT: every single time you witness someone being bullied. Every time, no exceptions.

WHY TO DO IT: In order to get bullying to stop, the bully needs to receive a negative consequence every single time they engage in undesirable behavior. Victims are often unwilling to stand up for themselves, or they were never taught how to, which means someone needs to stand up for them and it might as well be you. Additionally, you are doing the bully a favor by reporting them because it is actually helping them to learn more pro-social behavior.

WHAT TO EXPECT: Expect the bully to turn on you. They may threaten you or resort to name-calling. If they do, respond to the threat or the teasing appropriately and show them they do not intimidate you. Again, bullies are looking for people they can make afraid and by indicating you won't tolerate their behavior, you are letting them know that the cost of their behavior is going to be higher than they would like and this will go a long way towards getting them to stop.

RECAP

Bullies use a variety of techniques to instill fear in their victims. You can think of these things as a continuum. Bullying often starts out as name-calling and will escalate to threats of violence and escalate from there into actual violence. Your response will need to change as what they do changes.

Additionally when you take away their reward by not responding to them the way they want you to they will either escalate their behavior, in which case, you escalate your responses. If they decrease their behavior, you decrease yours.

For instance, if you or someone else is being threatened by violence and you respond by informing them they will be reported if they act on that threat, the bully will either deescalate to name calling (in which case you respond by looking them straight in the eye while telling

them their information is very helpful in a bored tone of voice), or they will escalate into actually violence (in which case you will defend yourself, escape and report them).

What is absolutely critical to the success of these techniques is that you respond as planned to the bully every single time they behave inappropriately. Do not allow a single instance of name calling to go unanswered. Likewise, don't just ignore the threats, let the bully know you aren't intimidated and that you will report them if they actually become violent. And definitely report every single act of violence. No exceptions. This consistency is what raises the cost of bullying to an unacceptable level and will get the bullying to stop.

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The Bully Vaccine: <http://thebullyvaccine.com>