



Bullying: Learn and Act

Almost a third of US students in grades six through ten are involved in moderate or frequent bullying: A 1998 study by the National Institute of Health found that nationwide, 3.2 million students were victims of bullying and 3.7 million were classified as bullies.

Bullying is not “teasing”: Bullying is negative acts between children, carried out repeatedly over time, involving a real or perceived power imbalance. For example, one child is bigger, older, or more popular. Because of this power imbalance, kids should never be asked to “work it out themselves”—this will never be a fair or safe solution. The bully will always be in the power seat, so adults must intervene.

Take bullying seriously. Bullying can create long-lasting effects that follow a child into adulthood. Bullying is related to academic failure, criminal behavior, clinical depression and suicide. This is true for both targets of bullying and those engaging in bullying.

How do I know if my child is a bully?

Four frequent characteristics of children who bully:

- Crave power and control
- Lack of empathy
- Lack of supervision
- High confidence and self-esteem

How do I know my child is being bullied?

Four frequent characteristics of targets:

- Low confidence and self-esteem
- Different and/or vulnerable somehow
- Socially isolated; few or no friends
- Lack of emotional control

WHAT CAN I DO?

Ask; listen; ask again. Children are usually too scared or embarrassed to bring up the topic. You will need to open the conversation. You may have to ask more than once. Don't forget to listen!

Act NOW: Provide your children with a supervised environment that models non-violent conflict resolution. Social skills training, developing hobbies and interests, empathy training, problem solving skills, anger management—all these can help as both prevention and interventions.

Validate feelings and fears. Feelings of fear, humiliation, loss of self-esteem, and insecurity are very common and real. Let your child know that you empathize, and won't give up on them.

Bullying can bring up your own experiences: try as much as possible to keep your own experience separate from your child's. You may need to talk with someone about your feelings so you can be present to validate your child's experience.

Work with the school: You know things about your child that the school doesn't know. They may know things about your child that you don't know. Gather and share information, remain calm, and be an advocate for your child and a partner with the school. This is important whether the teacher tells you your child is a target or engaging in bullying behaviors.

Educate yourself. Adults often have incorrect instincts about bullying. We tend to underestimate how often bullying occurs, and how severe it is when it occurs. Sometimes, if we don't know better, we can put our child or ourselves in a position that worsens the situation. Talk to your school's principal. Talk to other parents. Find out the school policy on bullying. That's a start.

Links to Further Resources

PTA.org

This is a link to one of a number of articles about bullying. This article is "Understanding Bullying". When you get to this article, you will see links to other articles about bullying.

Kidshealth.org

This web page is for children, about bullies. Kidshealth.org contains lots of other information for children.

Safe Schools Coalition

<http://www.safeschoolscoalition.org/bullyreport/index.html> Bullying report: how are Washington State Schools Doing? December 2003 Final Report. Has links to web-based report and web resources, PDF report summary, and PDF full report.

Colorado Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence

<http://www.colorado.edu/cspv/safeschools/bullying/resources.html>
Bullying prevention resources, fact sheets for parents, kids and schools.

Washington State Attorney General's Office

<http://www.atg.wa.gov/ProtectingYouth/SchoolSafety.aspx> The School Safety site offers a variety of tools to help make schools a safer place. You will find guidance on bullying – why it has become a big problem and what you can do about it. There also is information for parents and schools to help them create a safer environment.