

## **Bullies and Their Victims**

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### **What are some characteristics of children who are bullied?**

Children who are bullied are usually passive. They tend to be smaller than the bully and easily intimidated.

### **What are some characteristics of children who bully others?**

Bullies have a desire to dominate others, possibly because they have low self-esteem. They pick on others as a means of dealing with their own negative feelings. In many cases bullies have themselves been victims of bullying. Sometimes bullies are acting out uncomfortable feelings they have such as depression or frustration. Bullies often move on to more destructive and anti-social behavior as teens or adults so it requires attention.

### **Three kinds of bullying**

#### *Verbal*

Name calling, taunting, threatening are common. Most bullying starts off as verbal then escalates to physical.

#### *Physical*

Beating, hitting pushing, stealing, spitting are some examples

#### *Psychological*

Spreading rumors, excluding the child from activities and ridicule are ways that bullies intimidate or terrorize a victim. Berating someone based on their race, sexual preference, physical, mental or psychological state may also be a form of psychological bullying.

### **How does bullying affect a child?**

A child who is bullied may begin to feel bad about himself. His self-esteem may decrease. A victim may become depressed and withdrawn. He may stop trusting others and fail to make friends. Sometimes victims hold in these negative feelings and eventually lash out in a very strong way, against themselves or others.

#### *Some signs that a child is being bullied include*

Bed-wetting, sleep problems, nightmares, cries in sleep

Irritability or withdrawal or aggression

Depression or sadness

Doesn't want to go out of the house, or is clingy with parents. Your child may claim he has headaches to avoid going to school. He may lose interest in schoolwork.

## **How can parents help the child who is being bullied?**

### ***What not to do:***

Do not Show your anger- Focus on helping the child regain or develop positive feelings about him or herself.

Do not Encourage the child to fight back with violence. This usually leads to more aggression and the victim is at high risk of being beaten up. It also encourages the child to use bully behavior himself.

Do Not Ignore the situation. Tell your child calmly that you “hear him”. Give him time to talk about his feelings. Ask how he wants to deal with the situation. Also do not tell the child “just to ignore the situation”.

Do Not Do all of the problem solving. Give your child an opportunity (with your coaching and support) to try and solve the problem. Do only as much as you have to do and leave the rest to the child. This will build his confidence and mastery. Always discuss with your child what you plan to do and what he will be expected to do.

### ***What to do:***

If your child is being seriously abused immediate action is necessary

Listen- If you have observed your child being bullied, or if you suspect it, get your child talking about his feelings. If the bullying is happening at school look for some signs like refusing to go to school, ripped or torn clothing, bruises or cuts. Also observe the above signs that a child is being bullied. Ask general questions like “Who do you sit with at lunch? Who do you play with at recess? What do you like best/least about school and why”.

Build his self esteem- Tell him it is not his fault. If he is picked on because he is small or different, tell him you love him the way he is. Talk to him about bullies and help him put the situation in that context. Remind him that it is not his fault and you are in no way ashamed of him. Help your child identify some things he is good at and encourage his participation in these things. Also encourage physical activity and sports (without competition). Praise should be sincere and specific for it to matter.

Teach him social skills. Invite friends over to the house to play. If your child is “quirky” or has a disability such as autism, it may be necessary to teach very basic social skills such as how to engage in a conversation and how to read the social signals of others.

Stay calm- If he admits to being bullied, resist becoming too upset. This may make him feel sad and he may stop talking. He may even feel as though he has let you down by being a bully victim.

### Provide conflict coping strategies

- Teach your child to stand up for himself without violence or aggression
- If the abuse is just verbal tell him to walk away
- Teach your child to say “NO; or Stop that”;
- Encourage him to tell the bully how he feels when he is bullied

- Encourage him or her to *walk away* when he is bullied and encourage him to tell an adult if he feels he is in danger.
- Encourage your child to stay in a group if he is being bullied at school or in the neighborhood.
- Help your child identify some safe places to retreat from bullying.

#### Practice

Help your child practice what he can do or say when he is bullied. Encourage your child to speak and walk in an assertive manner.

#### Read about it

There are several books available on the topic of bullies and bullying. Reading and talking about it will make your child feel less alone. Ask your librarian for some references.

#### When bullying occurs in a family what can parents do?

Acknowledge that both the bully and the victim in the situation require your attention. See below for dealing with the child who is the bully.

Increase supervision as well as structure of routines and activities at home. Observe and record when bullying usually occurs. If it can be isolated to a specific situation or time of day, look at ways of increasing your supervision at those times.

Make sure you maintain a predictable routine at home  
Some children “fall apart” when their time is unstructured. Give them chores ideas for structured activities (games, art projects, physical activities).

Refrain from name calling of any sort in your home.

Look for ways your child may be learning to be a bully (television, video/computer games, friends, or family members). Sometimes parents unknowingly model bullying themselves. Parents must never bully their spouse or children. In other words, they must never hit, tease, or ridicule a child or spouse- even if it is “in fun”.

Put limits on roughhousing and make physical contact limits (i.e. rules about ways family members can and cannot touch each other; this may include family pets)

Parents must make sure they are in no way condoning bullying by laughing at or telling jokes that berate someone because of their race, religion or sexual orientation- or allowing their child to tell such jokes.

#### **What can parents do to help a child who is a bully?**

Recognize that the child who is the bully is as much in need of your attention and sensitivity as the victim.

Try to get a handle on why the child is bullying, while staying calm. Get him talking by asking the following questions:

*How do you feel about yourself?*

*How do you think things are going at home or school?*

*Who are your friends and what do you like to do together? Are you being bullied?*

*What do you think about being thought of as a bully? Why do you think you are bullying?*

*What might help you stop bullying?*

Emphasize that you consider the bullying a problem that needs to stop.

Tell your child that you will help him in whatever way he suggests to stop bullying. Then have him list several ways he can learn new behavior.

Practice these strategies with him and tell him you will be there to help him until he has learned to control himself. Set clear limits about his behavior. When you observe him being violent, stop him immediately.

When you observe him behaving well praise him immediately- is specific with your praise.

If the bullying is happening in the family, have a family meeting so everyone is aware of the problem. Enlist everyone's support, and make it clear that it is not okay to bully the child who has been bullying. If the bullying has been happening at school, meet with teachers or other adults about the behavior and what your child is going to do to improve his behavior. Also ask them how they might help your child exercise self-control.

Recognize that bullies often have a low self-esteem or may be depressed. Build his self esteem with praise and recognition for good behavior and skills. Make sure he has plenty of structured time, but that he does not feel overwhelmed. Look for sources of frustration that may be making him feel bad about himself.

Seek mental health counseling if the child is depressed, hurts animals, or cannot curb his aggressive behavior.