

Help—My Child Is Being Bullied

Bullying prevention and intervention have become a complex challenge for many schools, teachers, and parents. With the advancement of technology and advent of smart devices and online apps, bullying incidents have multiplied. They can leave a lasting impression on kids. This guide provides examples of bullying, tips for supporting kids, and legal information to keep kids safe. We've talked with parents who have faced these challenges, and we've incorporated their advice and suggestions in this resource.

Pennsylvania law defines bullying and cyberbullying as an intentional electronic, written, verbal, or physical act or acts that:

- Are directed at another student or students;
- Occur in a school setting;
- Are severe, persistent, or pervasive; and
- Have any of the following effects:
 - Interfere with a student's education
 - Create a threatening environment
 - Substantially disrupt the orderly operation of the school

School setting refers to in the school, on the school grounds, in school vehicles, or at a designated bus stop, or any activity sponsored, supervised, or sanctioned by the school. 24 P.S. § 13-1303.1-A (2008) The education system regards bullying as a childhood epidemic. A recent survey by the National Education Association presented alarming numbers, indicating that every day more than 160,000 students stay home from school to avoid being bullied or harassed by peers. The advancement of technology plays a significant role in the lives of youngsters, and cyber- and phone-based bullying.

Supporting Kids Who Are Bullied

- ▶ **Foster safe spaces, build trust, and model unconditional positive regard for every child.** Children want to be heard. Promoting a culture of availability and compassion makes kids more likely to confide in adults. Adults should listen and learn about the child's experience.
- ▶ **Be prepared and familiar with resources.** Advocate and build specialized supports around children who are or have been the victims of bullying. Collaborate with caregivers, teachers, and providers to support kids.
- ▶ **Remain person- and solution-focused.** Responses and solutions must be personalized and individualized for all children. What works for some children may not work for others.
- ▶ **Show children they are a priority.** Follow up and follow through. If you tell a child they can come to you, never delay them when they do. Check in with all involved parties on the child's status.
- ▶ **Model and teach assertive communication and body language.** Helping children practice skills such as responding assertively, normalizing their right to stick up for themselves, standing tall, and making eye contact. These can prove effective when dealing with bullies who target other children based on their perceived weakness, shyness, or smaller stature. Children who stand their ground without being competitive or condescending show the bully they cannot control others. These kids model pro-social, or positive and helpful, behavior between children.
- ▶ **Develop and practice a script with children.** Many adults learn a skill called "fake it till you make it." This approach can help kids. Sometimes children need a Plan B, especially when they lack confidence to stand up to someone bigger or stronger. Role playing ways your child could respond to situations at school, including when to walk away and ask for help from an adult, develops their conflict-resolution skills.



► **Always praise progress.** When your child shares how they effectively responded to a bully, take the time to listen. Reinforce positive interactions and model alternatives when there is room for improvement. Use playground and social observations as teaching moments, too! When you see other children respond to bullying behavior, explore this with your child as a moment to learn and grow together.

► **Always make safety a priority and strive to see the bigger picture.** We all have a responsibility to protect children, both the victim and the bully. Never direct your child to reciprocate against a bully with equally hurtful and harmful actions. Never pressure your child to win the next fight, grow tougher, or be braver. These are not solutions. These habits only reinforce behaviors that prompt bullying to begin. Children need teachers and guardians who provide space and opportunities to learn and grow safely. Adults occasionally must take a timeout to look at the big picture and act in the best interest of all children. Doing so encourages a generation of children capable of discussing their emotions, stating their needs, and resolving their problems without using violence or harming others with words.

Resources for keeping all kids safe from cyber- and school-based bullying:

Stopbullying.gov

cyberbullying.org

pacer.org/bullying is PACER's National Bullying Prevention Center

PA Department of Education Office for Safe Schools Bullying Prevention and Consultation Line: 1-866-716-0424