

My Child Is Bullying Others

What is Bullying?

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.

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 and harassment remain on the rise.

One in three students in the US have experienced at least one episode of bullying in their lifetime, and over half of those kids have encountered cyberbullying online or via text messages. Cyber-based lines of communication make bullying more invasive and persistent, and seemingly unavoidable for those targeted. Certain social media platforms and apps allow bullies to keep a low profile, create false personas, and remain anonymous to those they harass as well as those who could hold them accountable for their actions.

When children are exposed to emotional or physical threat and ongoing harassment, it may have an impact on their mental health and wellbeing. The emotional effects of bullying hurt academic performance, create low self-esteem, and result in a higher likelihood of symptoms of anxiety and depression.

The American Academy of Pediatrics says when children experience bullying at a young age, they become more prone to psychological challenges compared to teens and young adults. Elementary school-aged children who have been bullied are 80% more likely to have feelings of sadness most days they attend school.

Why Does a Child Become a Bully?

Perhaps the most difficult question to hear and attempt to answer for your child is, "Why me?" It's natural to have resentment and anger toward the classmate causing your child emotional distress or even physical harm. One piece of understanding the source of the problem for parents is knowing why children assume a bully role.



Most often, children who bully their peers have a significantly low self-esteem and subsequently lack empathy for others. There is a normal level of social development in children that leads them to test the boundaries of what is acceptable and unacceptable behavior. We often see this through the stages of childhood development when children learn how to share toys, work together in teams, and develop social relationships with other children. We also see it during identity development in puberty and adolescence. There is a fine line, however, between normal social boundary testing or teasing and harmful harassment.

When children habitually harass others, target children because of their vulnerabilities and differences, and threaten the safety and/or wellbeing of others, there is a dynamic shift in power and control between the victim, child, and bully. This appeals to children who lack:

- Nurturing at home
- Skills to manage or communicate their own needs or emotions
- Support they need to resolve conflicts and face challenges

In some cases, kids who bully other kids may witness physical aggression or aggressive communication styles in their homes. These children may have undiagnosed behavioral challenges or learning disabilities that disrupt sound decision-making and pro-social conduct. Most bullies experience feelings very similar to those felt by kids being bullied – insecurity, fear, and embarrassment. Their actions may be unpredictable. It is important to consider these children when investigating bullying behavior. Taking an authoritarian stance against the child who bullies others may worsen the root feelings leading to their anti-social behaviors.

We suggest taking these steps to support kids who demonstrate this behavior:

- ▶ Provide opportunities for smaller groups of students to talk openly about bullying. Kids need to know bullying behavior is damaging, abusive, and unacceptable.
- ▶ Show consequences for bullying behavior. Having a dialogue that introduces and reinforces accountability and responsibility can be done without being threatening. By respectfully communicating rules, boundaries, and acceptable versus unacceptable behavior, kids receive the opportunity to learn lessons on respecting themselves and others.
- ▶ Promote pro-social responses, behaviors, and interpersonal dynamics. Children count on role models, especially in school. Teaching emotional regulation and coping and listening skills helps youngsters understand the impact of bullying behavior and the value of effective communication of needs and feelings.
- ▶ Hold those you entrust with the care of your children accountable. Reach out to teachers, school counselors, principals, and superintendents for assistance with intervention. We suggest that you do not confront other parents or children yourself. Doing so creates risk for you, your child, and the other family. Instead, reach out to those who can be a sounding board, providing direction and resources for all parties.

If you find that your outreach goes unanswered or unsupported, contact the U.S. Department of Education Civil Rights Hotline at 1-800-421-3481 and discuss your concerns.

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

Stopbullying.gov

cyberbullying.org

pacер.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