

No More Bullying: Dealing with Aggression and Teasing

What Can Parents and Teachers Do to Help Bullies and Their Victims?

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Being teased, threatened, humiliated, or assaulted by schoolyard bullies has become a fact of life for many children. Frequently, they are told to accept the name-calling and bullying as part of growing up. However, bullying and harassment often create a climate of fear that interferes with school performance, and can lead to depression, anxiety, and social withdrawal. If bullies are allowed to get away with their actions, they frequently become even more aggressive. Research shows that both bullies and their victims fight more often than their peers. It is important for parents and teachers to help both the victims *and* the perpetrators in order to build safer schools and neighborhoods for all children.

Helping the Bullies

1. ***Don't label the child.*** Calling your child a "bully" only makes the problem worse. Instead, talk about specific examples of when your child was acting aggressively, and possible reasons for the aggression (e.g., peer pressure, thinking it's okay, trying to get back at someone who was mean to them, etc.). Brainstorm several positive alternatives to aggression with your child they could use in that same situation next time.
2. ***Intervene immediately.*** Many adults have a tendency to ignore bullying, thinking that children should be given a chance to work things out on their own, or that bullying is just part of growing up. This teaches the bully that they can easily get away with aggressive behavior. Instead, stop bullying behavior as soon as you notice it, separate the bully from the victim for a "cooling off" period, then make it very clear that aggression and name-calling are unacceptable. Always confront bullies in private. Challenging a bully in front of his/her peers often enhances their status and can actually increase aggression in the future.
3. ***Provide close supervision.*** Research shows that the frequency and severity of bullying is related to the amount of adult supervision that children receive. Without clear rules against aggressive behavior and consistent consequences for aggression, bullying behavior usually increases.
4. ***Promote a positive climate at home and at school.*** When parents and schools do respond to bullying, their first reaction frequently is to focus only on punishment, often involving harsh discipline such as yelling or physical punishment, or severe measures such as suspension from school or expulsion. These consequences can have long-term negative effects, and do not teach children to get along better. Instead, create a positive climate at home and school where individuals are respected and appreciated for their talents

and abilities, and where children are taught to work together cooperatively without competition, and to compromise when necessary.

5. **Reward appropriate social interactions.** Encourage children to get along with peers by rewarding them (with praise, attention, special activities, snacks, points, stickers, etc.) for helping others, cooperating, sharing, saying nice things, and solving conflicts in non-aggressive ways. Don't take good social skills for granted!

Helping the Victims

1. **Use the Buddy System.** Suggest that your child stick with two or more other children at the playground, bus stop, or wherever bullies may bother them. Most aggressive children will leave others alone if they are in the middle of a group.
2. **Encourage immediate reporting of bullying.** Let children know that it is safe for them to tell you about experiencing or witnessing peer aggression, and that you won't blame them for the bullying, or for not "standing up for themselves." Practice with them what to say to a teacher or other adult if they need to make a report so that your child will feel more confident approaching the adult for help.
3. **Teach and practice assertiveness.** Tell your child that while it's *not* okay to respond to aggression with more aggression, they can respond to a bully in a bold, assertive manner by standing up tall and using a loud, deep voice, saying, "*Leave me alone!*" instead of looking intimidated. Role-play this with your child at home so they know what to do under pressure.
4. **Teach and practice appropriate responses to teasing.** The standard adult advice for how to deal with teasing and name-calling usually is to "just ignore it." However, when ignoring doesn't work, teach your child to respond with **agreement** ("You are right, my shirt IS really ugly - so what?" or "You say that like it's a bad thing."), a **compliment** ("Well, YOUR shirt is really cool!") or **invitation** ("Could you try just a little harder to be mean to me?" or "I dare you to say something nice to me.") - this deflects the meanness and does not encourage any further teasing.
5. **Support other victims of bullying.** Encourage children to report the victimization of others to an adult immediately; reassure them that this is not the same as tattling. Also encourage them to offer support to the victim directly, for example by saying kind words, or helping to pick up the victim's books and handing them back to him/her.

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