

How do I help my child who is bullying?

Project Prevent and Address Bullying (PPAB)

for Students with Disabilities

For Parents

Northern Illinois University | School Psychology Program

No parent wants to think their child is bullying, and just because your child is engaging in these behaviors, it does not make them a bad kid. It does, however, require your attention as a parent. In order to help your child, it is first important to know some basics:

- Bullying is a common behavior. About 17 percent of children engage in bullying behaviors.
- Bullying is also very complex. While there is not one “type” of child who bullies, there tends to be two types of individuals who bully.

There are those who are popular with their peers and do well in many ways in school (e.g., athletics, good grades). These individuals may bully as a way of showing off and/or to keep their popularity.

There are students who have difficulty with their behavior and controlling their emotions. These individuals may bully because they have trouble figuring out how to control their emotions in positive ways and/or they may react to others impulsively.

You might find your child fits into one category more than the other, and while some of the warning signs below might apply, some might not. This list is meant to provide a few examples and is not exhaustive.

Warning signs your child might be engaging in bullying behaviors. Is/does your child:

- Always the one doing the teasing? Is there no back-and-forth?
- Continue to push or bother others even when asked to stop?
- Purposely isolate or exclude others?
- Have a hot temper or is easily angered?
- Not feel bad when they see others being bullied or picked on?
- Come home with things you did not give them?
- Spread rumors about others?
- Engage in cyberbullying? (For more information on cyberbullying please see handouts on cyberbullying.)
- Talk about being aggressive toward others or use aggressive language (e.g., threats, slurs)?
- Get in trouble at school with adults for being aggressive with peers?
- Overly aggressive with siblings?
- Easily get caught up in bad behavior of peers (i.e., participate in others’ bullying behaviors)?



NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY

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My child might be engaging in bullying behaviors. What should I do?

Just as bullying is complex, so is addressing it. First, take all accusations of bullying seriously. While teasing and interpersonal conflict are expected in children, nobody deserves to be bullied. There is not a one-size-fits-all solution and each situation needs individual attention. Below are some steps you can follow to take action.

Step One: Talk to your child:

- Keep an open dialogue with your child; communication is key to understanding why they might be engaging in bullying behavior.
- Talk to your child about the claims without placing blame or punishment immediately. First, find out your child's perspective about the incident(s).
- Make a record of your child's account of the incident(s) including key details such as what happened, who was involved, when, and where.
- If your child does admit fault, thank them for being honest, but hold them responsible for their actions and have them apologize.
- From the first instance, treat the problem seriously by telling your child that aggressive and mean behaviors are not tolerated.

Step Two: Set rules and expectations about how to treat others respectfully. Reward the child when they follow rules and establish consequences for when rules are broken.

- This also applies to cyberbullying and online behavior.

Step Three: If your child is engaging in bullying behaviors at school, keep an open dialogue with the school. Let school staff (e.g., teachers, counselors, principal, etc.) know that you are willing to work with them.

Step Four: Whatever the reason for the behavior, identify positive coping mechanisms and means of changing negative thoughts with your child. For example:

- Develop your child's empathy for others by practicing ways to interact that are respectful and cooperative. For example, read stories about the harmful effects of bullying to get them to think about how others may feel, show positive examples of interpersonal behavior, or volunteer in the community.
- If you determine that your child is unable to control their aggression, teach alternative behaviors such as taking a deep breath or getting the help of an adult when upset. Seek support of a doctor, teacher, school counselor or psychologist who can help your child learn to decrease aggression.
- If you determine that your child is lacking self-esteem, work with them to build a more positive self-image.

Step Five: Regularly monitor your child's behavior and how they interact with their peers (including online behavior, if applicable).

- Many of these behaviors occur when adults are not present, therefore it is especially important to monitor behavior

Step Six: If you witness bullying behaviors, take action in the moment. Use these opportunities to catch and correct behavior as it occurs..

Step Seven: Be Patient! It may take a while for your child to learn to use appropriate conflict management skills.

Find additional handouts on our website at go.niu.edu/PPAB



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