

Bullying Prevention and Intervention Tips for Families

Prevention

1. Increase Communication

Initiate discussion about your children's social and online lives on a regular basis. Ask specific questions that generate meaningful dialogue (e.g., instead of "How was school?," try "What is lunchtime like at your school—who do you sit with, what do you do and what do you talk about?"). Make sure that your demeanor communicates genuine interest and openness as opposed to the desire to control or invade privacy.

2. Monitor Behavior

Observe your children in different settings by volunteering at school, participating in extracurricular activities and being watchful during social gatherings. If you notice that your children are overly aggressive, vulnerable to peer pressure or exhibit other behavior that troubles you, talk to them about your concerns and redirect the behavior. Be vigilant about the warning signs associated with bullying behavior (e.g., social withdrawal, fear of attending school, avoidance of or preoccupation with technology) and trust your instinct to intervene if your children don't seem to be their usual selves.

3. Facilitate Positive Social Experiences

Help your children to choose friends and hobbies that make them feel good about themselves. If you notice that certain relationships or activities cause unhealthy conflict or bad feelings, talk about ways to improve things move away from the negative situation. Guide your children in finding friends and interests in varied settings so that they do not rely on only one place as their social outlet. Help your children to stay bonded to at least one close friend—feeling socially connected can help to mitigate the effects of bullying.

4. Promote Responsible Online Behavior

Talk with your children about ethical online behavior, including respect for privacy and the impact of denigrating others. Make sure that they understand how to protect their own privacy online (e.g., keep personal information, passwords and PINs confidential) and how to respond when targeted by negative online behavior (see Prevention Tip #6). Help your children to set healthy limits on the amount of time spent online and actively supervise online activities. If you use



filtering and monitoring software, be open about it and don't rely on these tools as a substitute for direct participation in their online lives.

5. Talk about Bullying

Make a point of explicitly bringing up bullying. Specifically define bullying, what it looks like and what to do when it occurs. Communicate your values and expectations regarding their social behavior on and offline, and help them to clarify their own values and ways to act on them in the face of peer pressure and aggression. Discuss and rehearse ways to respond to social cruelty, and make it clear that your children can and should come to you for help when they witness or are involved in bullying situations.

6. Be a Role Model

Think about the messages your children receive when you make judgmental comments, gossip or behave aggressively toward friends, family members, drivers on the road or help staff in stores. Use technology responsibly and avoid forwarding mean or biased jokes and posts. Model what it means to be an ally and to stand up against prejudice and cruelty on and offline.

7. Be Involved at School

Advocate for policies, programs and practices that encourage positive social behavior and be vocal when adults/institutions fall short of their responsibility to protect children and maintain safe environments. Don't wait until your child is the target to get involved and speak up.

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Intervention

1. Offer Support

If you learn that your child is being bullied, take a deep breath and listen openly and without judgment. Convey that you believe what your child is telling you and that the bullying is not her/his fault. Resist offering knee-jerk solutions, especially directives to retaliate or just ignore the situation. Rather than trying to solve the problem for your child, engage her/him in a thoughtful discussion about options for responding. Take some time to research and think things through together. Keep the lines of communication open and reassure your child that her/his safety and well-being are your top concerns.

2. Gather Information

Ask specific questions about the bullying incidents in a non-blaming way and document as many details as possible about who was involved, where/when/how often it took place, what form the bullying took and who may have witnessed the incidents. If the bullying took place electronically, print/save relevant screenshots, emails, texts, photos, etc., and instruct your child not to delete such evidence in the future. Tell your child not to engage with aggressors online.

3. Reach out to the School

Meet with the appropriate authority at your child's school and/or other institutions where the bullying is taking place. Recount the facts of the situation and share documentation and evidence. Convey that you want to work together to solve the problem rather than taking a confrontational tone. Ask for a concrete plan of action before leaving and check in regularly to ensure follow-through. If the problem continues, contact school authorities again (someone higher up in the chain of command if necessary). Be firm and persistent.

4. Contact Law Enforcement

If the bullying/cyberbullying involves possible criminal behavior—such as hate motivated violence, repeated harassment, stalking, or inappropriate sexual conduct—report the incident(s) to law enforcement. If the school is not taking action to protect your child from serious bullying, consider consulting an attorney to explore legal options.



5. Build Resilience

Work with your child to develop strategies and skills for responding to future bullying in ways that feel comfortable. Rehearse specific words and actions that can be used in response to bullying and identify safe people to go to for help. While learning self-defense often builds confidence, avoid the impulse to encourage physical retaliation, which usually escalates the problem and could lead to disciplinary repercussions for your child. Guide your child to get involved with new friends and interests that build their confidence and make them feel good about themselves. If emotional problems related to bullying persist, seek out a guidance counselor or mental health professional for extra assistance.

6. Keep Your Child Safe Online

Report serious instances of cyberbullying to Internet/cell phone service providers and the Web sites where the offensive comments/images were posted (e.g., Facebook, YouTube). Work with your child to change screen names, email addresses and passwords, if necessary, and learn how to use the blocking features on your child's technology. If cyberbullying is taking place via the school systems, notify the principal and school resource officer so that they can take the necessary security and disciplinary actions. Do not punish your child by limiting access to technology, but guide them to spend time in forums that are safe and positive.