

How to deal with bullying

You may have noticed your child is showing some of the signs of being bullied, or you might discover they have been bullied in some other way.

The big question is how to stop bullying? The first recommended step is to try to get your child to open up about what's happening in their life by showing them that you understand and won't judge them.

Listen

Try to listen to the whole story without interrupting. Be empathetic, calm and show you understand what the child is saying. They might need to tell their story more than once.

Talk

Have a conversation about what happened. Try not to let your very understandable emotions (anger, distress...) show. Your feelings can intensify the child's or make it worse for them and might even deter your child from talking to you another time.

Remind your child it's normal to feel hurt, it's never OK to be bullied.

Tell them the behaviour was intentional, meant to hurt and won't just go away.

Ask your child what they would like to happen. Often all they want to know is how to stop the bullying. Children may feel that if the perpetrator is punished, it will be worse for them in the long run.

Find out what is happening

Note what, when and where the bullying occurred, who was involved, how often and if anybody else witnessed it. Don't offer to confront the young person or their parents yourself. This might make things worse for your child.

Contact your child's school

Bullying arises from social situations - family, school, clubs, and work - and if possible, cases of bullying are best dealt with where they occur. In children's lives, school is the most common location for bullying. It's therefore important you alert the school to the situation, as they may not be aware of it.

Don't assume the school will know about the situation, because your child may not have told them. The majority of children and teenagers do not disclose to teachers or parents. Be confident that once alerted the school will want to stop bullying behaviour as much as you.



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Here are some tips to guide your discussions with the school

- Make an appointment to speak to your child's teacher or coordinator.
- Check your school's bullying/online bullying policy. This may be contained within the behaviour or wellbeing policy. It might be available on the school's website or printed in the school diary. Note what the policy promises to do to keep children safe from harm and respond to the situation.
- Take along your notes about the situation or screen-shots, texts etc. It's often difficult to remember specific details.
- Find out if the school is aware of the bullying.
- Ask what is being done to ensure your child's safety.
- Ask for a follow-up appointment to ensure the situation is being addressed. The school may ask you to attend a restorative conference. If so, they will explain to you what is involved.
- If your child asks to stay home from school, explain it won't help - and may make things worse.

Give sensible advice

Encourage your child not to fight back, but coach them to use neutral, or (if appropriate) joking language in response and help them explore other possible responses.

Other useful advice includes:

Tell them that the behaviour was intentional and it won't just go away.

Explain it's safer to avoid people, places or situations that could expose them to further bullying.

If your child asks to stay home from school, explain that it won't help - and may make things worse.

If possible, help to make opportunities for them to join other groups of young people e.g. clubs at school or other groups outside of school time.