

Parents: What to Do When Your Child Is the Bully

No parent likes to think that their child could be deliberately humiliating or bullying other kids. As a parent, if you receive word that your child is engaging in bully behavior, you have a special responsibility to learn all you can about this persistent problem, and take steps to correct your child's behavior to prevent further harm to others.

There is no "one size fits all" profile of bullies. They can be girls or boys, and can come from any group you imagine – any race, gender, economic class or creed. Studies have shown that bullies act out for a variety of reasons: They may be showing frustration about situations in their own lives, or trying to fit in with the "cool" crowd. Bullies typically have problems understanding the feelings of others, and when they want to be in control they will use hurtful techniques to dominate other children. Bullying is also a family problem: Child bullies often see their parents or older siblings get what they want by bullying, and usually are not adequately supervised by their parents. However, some bullying victims may try to deal with their humiliation by becoming bullies themselves.

Bullying is a complex situation that requires understanding the facts and developing a thoughtful approach. Fortunately, once parents become aware of their child's bullying behavior, there is much they can do to correct it. Act quickly to help your child learn how to handle feelings and work through conflicts with others in an appropriate and mature manner. Here are some guidelines to follow:

- Keep your cool. It's natural to respond with anger when your child is accused of bullying, but that will not help you deal with the school officials and the other child's parents.
- Teach your child to think about the feelings of others. Explain to your child the ways his or her behavior has harmed another person, and ask him how he would feel if he was treated like that. Help your child practice ways to apologize to the other student. Give praise when your child starts to show compassion for others.
- Make your demands to your child clear -- bullying must stop or there will be consequences -- and at the same time, help your child develop healthier ways of relating to others. Role-play different situations and brainstorm positive messages for your child to use in day-to-day encounters with schoolmates and peers.

- Rule out disability as a cause. Children with disabilities often have behavioral issues and poor social skills, and may resort to bullying as way to gain acceptance with peers. If your child has been identified as having a disability, work together with the Individualized Education Program team to develop ways to improve your child's interaction with others. The bullying behavior must be addressed, but it should be done in a way that takes into account the nature of your child's disability. This may require testing and/or mental health counseling for your child, especially if the bullying behavior does not stop.
- Be a good role model and set the example for healthy, nonviolent behavior in your home. When you're discussing or sharing stories about your work day, for example, don't spread malicious gossip or mock co-workers' appearance, disability or other characteristics. Children model the behavior of their parents, so the bullying has to stop with you.