



Parent Guide To Bullying



What is Bullying?

Simply put, bullying is a pattern of unwelcome or aggressive behaviour, often with the goal of making others uncomfortable, scared or hurt. It is almost always used as a way of having control or power over their target and it is often based on another person's appearance, culture, race, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation or gender identity.

All incidents of bullying are serious and need to be addressed. It must be noted that bullying is distinctly different than conflict, as a conflict is generally a disagreement or difference in opinion between peers who typically have equal power in their relationships.

Types of Bullying

There are four common types of bullying. It is important to identify which type of bullying is impacting your child so you can understand what is happening to them and what you can do to help your child.

Physical: includes hitting, kicking, tripping, pinching, pushing or damaging property.

Verbal: includes name-calling, insults, teasing, intimidation, homophobic or racist remarks or verbal abuse.

Social &

Emotional: also called "relational bullying", includes behavioural actions designed to harm a child's reputation or cause humiliation, like lying and spreading rumours, negative facial gestures, playing mean jokes to embarrass or humiliate a child, mimicking the child in a mean way, encouraging social exclusion of a child, etc.

Cyber: includes taunting or humiliation through social media sites (Facebook, Twitter, etc.) or the Internet, cruel websites targeting specific youth, humiliating others while playing online games, verbal or emotional bullying through chat rooms, instant message or texting, posting photos of other youth on rating websites, etc. Cyber bullying is the newest of the four bullying types, and it is constantly evolving as new technology and social media sites are introduced. Cyber bullying has expanded the boundary of bullying, allowing kids to be bullied 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, regardless of where they are – even in their own bedrooms.

The Bully

Bullying is about power and power is something that some children will naturally want to experiment with. Some kids may use bullying as a way to enhance their social power and protect their prestige with their peers. Some kids actually use bullying to deflect taunting and aggression that is directed towards them – a form of self-protection.

There are usually many reasons why a child might engage in bullying behaviour including:

- lack of warmth and true involvement from their parents
- overly-permissive parenting
- harsh, physical discipline from their parents
- lack of self-confidence
- poor behaviour modeled at home by their parents or siblings or other adults in their lives
- poor behaviour modeled in the community or in school by their peers
- attempt to gain power in reaction to being bullied by others

Children who bully may turn into teens who sexually harass, become involved in delinquent behaviours, display gang-associated behaviour or engage in dating violence. Research shows that bullies are seven times more likely than other students to carry weapons to school. It also shows that children who acted as bullies in grades 6 to 9 are six times more likely to have a criminal record by the age of 24.

The Bystander

What is power without an audience? Currently approximately 88% of bullying takes place in the presence of youth other than the bully and the victim. There are two types of bystanders – the “hurtful” and the “helpful”. Let’s quickly explain both of these.

Hurtful Bystander

Those who support the bullying by laughing, cheering, video-taping or making comments that encourage the bully. Forwarding cruel photos or texts, and visiting websites that are targeting a specific youth also encourage the bully. They may also join in on the bullying once it begins. Another example could be those who simply watch and say/do nothing – they give the bully the audience he or she craves, and silently allow the bully to continue with their hurtful behaviour. Even “liking” a cruel comment on a YouTube video or on Facebook is wrong – it is just as bad as writing it.

Helpful Bystander

Those who directly intervene by discouraging the bully, defending the victim or redirecting the situation away from bullying. He or she may also rally support from their peers to stand up against bullying or report the bullying to adults. This could be as simple as telling the bully to “leave him or her alone” or “cut it out”.

Bystanders can effectively stop bullying within 10 seconds of an intervention. It is important to make sure youth know the important role they can play and realize the power they have when they stand up for what is right and stand up for each other.

What are the Effects of Bullying?

The effects of bullying on youth can be traumatic and long-lasting. Victims of bullying can show a range of emotional, behavioural, physical and relationship problems. In extreme cases, bullying can lead to suicide. Bullying is very serious and its impact on children and youth must be taken seriously.

Some of the common effects of bullying on the child or youth who is bullied include:

- depression (including sadness, loss of interest in activities)
- anxiety (tenseness, fear and worries)
- loss of self-esteem
- increased levels of aggressive behaviour
- health problems like headaches, stomach aches
- loneliness and social anxiety
- missing school
- social withdrawal and isolation
- suicidal thoughts or suicide (in the most extreme cases)

Some adults who were bullied in their youth report extended psychological harm into adulthood including: continued distress, self-blame, fear and internalized problems like depression.

There are also effects on the children or youth who bully that need to be considered. They not only have problems with peer relationships, they are at risk for many behaviour and relationship problems as they get older, including:

- aggression
- sexual harassment
- dating aggression
- delinquency
- alcohol or drug use
- gang involvement

A child or youth can be both a bully and a victim and may move between the two. These children and youth experience the most serious emotional, behavioural and relationship problems, and require the most intensive support.

What are Effective Ways for Parents to Deal with their Child who is Bullied?

Bullying can be a tough topic to bring up with your kids, but it is an important conversation.

Bullying and aggression are often a **cry for help**. It is important to be open to the possibility that your child could be in one of these roles. The most important thing you can do as a parent is to listen and not dismiss your child when they want to talk – they may only try once.

Parents should not over or under react when being told by their child they have been bullied at school. Parents should encourage the child to stay away from the alleged bully and let the school investigate and remedy the problem.

Parents must also not dismiss the child's experience. If a child has the courage to tell someone they have been bullied, it could be devastating to be told to "work it out for yourself" or "they are just teasing you".

Parents should encourage their child to keep talking about the incident if the child feels the need to discuss. A way to open conversation with your child is to ask them to rate their day. Follow up questions must be open-ended and allow the child to explain what went well for them, or if they had a challenging day, to explore that in a safe and gentle way, keeping the lines of communication open so their child doesn't shut down. Parents need to provide extra support and encouragement to the child during these times.

When a parent is exposed to bullying with their child for the first time, it is imperative that the parents are supported and encouraged to come to the school to gain a factual understanding of the incident. Working together with the parent, the school can build a plan for intervention, support and resolution. This can be a very unsettling time for a parent and their immediate reaction will often be to protect their child. To some parents, this may mean withdrawing their child from school. However, by working together, the school can help provide the parents and student with strategies to build the child's resilience and problem solving skills.

Parents should expect the child to have a difficult time dealing with being a target of bullying and should be very cautious on placing blame on either person.

If a child is reluctant to talk to the parent, the parent should encourage the child to talk to another adult, such as a family member or a trusted school staff member.

Research indicates that responding to a bully in an aggressive manner will not make the bully go away and could potentially escalate the situation.

How Should Parents Deal with their Child who is the Bully

- parents should treat the problem as a serious matter, and it is important they remain calm and open-minded
- parents should listen carefully and ask their child questions regarding the situation
- parents should try to find out the reasons and potential motivation or justification for their child's bullying behavior and seek help from the school
- upon receiving a report that their child has been bullying at school, parents should make it clear to their child that this conduct must stop immediately

Warning Signs

Children and youth who are being victimized by a bully or who have become a bully themselves, will often display changes in their behaviour. It is important that you as a parent know the warning signs, and pay attention to any signs that your child may be exhibiting. It doesn't necessarily mean they are involved in bullying, but it may indicate the need to start a conversation and check in with your child.

Signs that Your Child is Being Bullied

Children and youth who are being bullied by others will often display a change in behaviour or emotions including:

- not wanting to go to school or participate in extra-curricular activities
- anxious, fearful or over-reactive
- shows low self-esteem and makes negative comments about him or herself or a former friend
- regular complaints of stomach aches, headaches, and other physical symptoms without any particular cause
- lower interest and performance in school (i.e. drop in grades, development of learning issues)
- injuries, bruising, damaged clothing or broken items
- unhappy and irritable
- trouble sleeping, nightmares, bed-wetting
- frequent crying
- threatens to hurt him or herself or others
- significant changes in social life (i.e. no one is calling or inviting him or her out)

Signs that Your Child is a Bully

Children and youth who bully may show signs that they are using power aggressively including:

- little concern for the feeling of others
- aggressive with siblings, parents, friends, teachers and animals
- bossy and manipulative to get his or her own way
- coming home with unexplained objects or extra money
- secretive about possessions, activities or where they have been
- easily frustrated and quickly angered
- believe aggression is an acceptable way to resolve conflicts
- abuse others physically or verbally
- get into fights and blame others for starting them
- have a need to dominate others
- have two or three friends who are also aggressive
- hang out with increasingly younger children
- quick to interpret accidents or neutral events as deliberate hostile acts

There are many more warning signs to watch for. It is important to know your child and look for changes in behaviour, emotions or attitude that could be signaling an issue – or a brewing problem.

Strategies for Your Child

Wherever possible, include your child in the resolution. Teach him or her how to handle bullies or conflict in a more positive manner and show him or her how to report a bully. Some other things you can do include:

- role-play with your child to show him or her positive ways to handle bullying or conflict. Give him or her tips and tricks on how to handle a bully, or how to resolve conflict in a non-aggressive way– i.e. act out a scenario where you are the bully in the schoolyard, carefully taunting your child. Have him or her look you directly in the eye and tell you firmly to stop it, and then walk away. *(caution: if your child is particularly vulnerable, be cautious not to further add to their distress through role playing.)*
- create opportunities for your child to make new friends
- help your child report the bullying – either through the [online reporting tool](#)
www.psst-bc.ca or to a trusted adult at school
- encourage your child to stay away from the bully while the school investigates and finds a solution to the problem
- teach your child the difference between assertiveness and aggression – make sure they know that it is okay to stand up for themselves but it is not okay to be violent
- look into mentoring programs that may help your child gain some positive attention and new interests
- enroll your child in activities in or out of school, like sports, music, drama, art, etc.

How to Talk to the School

It is important to include the school in your conversation around bullying. School connectedness is strongly associated with positive mental health and wellness. A teacher or school administrator can play an important role in promoting school connectedness, and will bring a different perspective to the conversation and will be able to help support your child.

- ◆ develop a plan to address the bullying with your child's school - know who to talk to first:
 - ◆ talk to the teacher about the problem if it occurs in a specific class (i.e. gym class)
 - ◆ talk to the principal if the problem is happening in the hallways, on the playground, at the bus stop or if the problem persists in the classroom
 - ◆ if neither of the above is able to help resolve the problem, talk to the district principal, assistant superintendent or the district superintendent
- ◆ know the policies, procedures and escalation process in your school district, and find out what is best for your child's circumstance - make sure you get a copy of the "Code of Conduct" from your child's school - this is often found on the school district website
- ◆ if you feel your child is not safe, report the situation to your local police and the school - in B.C., many schools are working with police and youth-serving agencies to prevent bullying

Setting a Good Example

As a parent, you're responsible for displaying positive and acceptable behaviour for your children. Children often mimic what they see at home. Here are some things you can do at home, to help set a positive example:

- ◆ be a hands-on parent - this means talking to your child, listening, knowing who his or her friends are, monitoring activities, increasing the time spent with your child, etc.
- ◆ think about your interaction with your child - Are you actively listening? Do you ask questions about his/her life? Do you acknowledge or reward his or her positive behaviour?

◆ pay attention to your own behaviour - How do you handle conflict? How do you acknowledge the feelings of others? - make sure you are setting a good example for your child

◆ decrease violence at home — turn off violent tv shows, movies and videogames

If your child is a bully, you need to ask yourself some tough questions about how you and your spouse resolve conflict at home, at work, or with your children. Making positive behaviour changes at home can be a great step in changing your child's behaviour.

10 Ways Parents can Address Bullying

1. consider your own behaviour
2. establish a code of conduct
3. use consequences that teach
4. encourage children to report
5. catch children being good
6. create friendship opportunities
7. give your children scripts
8. build on children's strengths
9. be ready to listen
10. Be your child's champion

Tips to Share with Your Children

- if it is hard to stand up for yourself, ignore the bullying, walk away and tell someone who can help
- get funny — humour shows you're not bothered.
- be assertive, not aggressive — fighting makes the bullying worse.
- remember that telling is not tattling
- if you walk away and get help, you are part of the solution — if you stay and watch, you are part of the problem
- put yourself in the other kid's shoes — Would you want to be picked on or left out?
- apologize to the kids you have bullied
- be a real leader — treat others with respect

Resources

www.psst-bc.ca

www.erasebullying.ca

www.bullying.org

www.bullybeware.com

www.pinkshirtday.ca

www.cyberbullying.ca

www.preventbullying.org

www.kidshelpphone.ca