

Say No to Bullying

Bullying is a complicated topic—in fact, educators are constantly learning more about ways to prevent and deal with bullying behavior. But what can parents do? A lot, actually! This guide tackles myths about bullying to help you understand what it is and how to help your child navigate different situations.

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Myth: Kids will be kids—bullying is just part of growing up.

Fact: Bullying has serious consequences for everyone involved. Children who are bullied can fall behind in school and develop depression and anxiety. Sometimes these issues continue into adulthood. And kids who bully are more likely to get into trouble at school and even break the law when they're older.

What to do: Take bullying seriously. If you suspect that your youngster is being targeted or is bullying others, call or email his teacher or school counselor. Also, talk to your child. You could begin by asking if he's aware of bullying at school. If he admits to being bullied or to bullying, work with the school to address the problem. And if he insists everything is fine, keep the lines of communication open so he's comfortable confiding in you about bullying. ♥

Myth: Bullying is usually physical.

Fact: Bullying comes in many forms. In fact, the most common types are verbal (name-calling, threats) and social (spreading rumors, deliberately shunning others). When verbal or social bullying happens online, it's called cyberbullying. Keep in mind that all kinds of bullying have two things in common. First, the attacks are ongoing, and second, a child who bullies has more power than her target. She may be bigger, older, or more popular, for instance. *Note:* A one-time incident or minor teasing between friends usually isn't considered bullying.

What to do: Start a conversation with your youngster about the different kinds of bullying so she learns to recognize them. Together, brainstorm examples of each, along with ways she could respond. If your child spends time online, make sure she communicates only with relatives and close friends. She shouldn't chat or network with people she doesn't know in real life. ♥

Myth: Children can handle bullying on their own.

Fact: Youngsters usually need adult help to deal with bullying.

What to do: If your child is bullied, let her know it isn't her fault and that you and other adults are there to support her. Ask when and where the bullying occurs. Then, contact the school, even if the bullying takes place off school property or online. That way, you can find out what rules are in place to protect your youngster. If your child witnesses bullying and feels safe intervening, she could give the person being targeted an escape ("The teacher needs to see us now"). If she thinks it would be dangerous to step in, she should quickly tell the nearest adult. ♥



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Myth: I'd know if my child were being bullied or bullying others.

Fact: A youngster who is targeted may keep the situation a secret for fear that the person bullying him will get mad and harm him even more. He may also hesitate to tell an adult because he's ashamed or feels like the bullying is his fault. And children who bully usually do so when adults aren't looking.

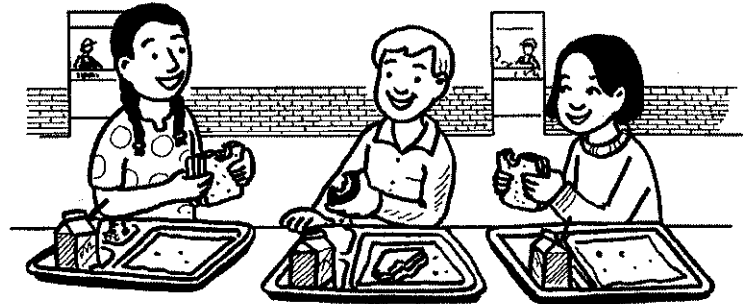
What to do: Be alert for warning signs that your child is being bullied. *Examples:* Frequent headaches or stomachaches,

changes in eating or sleeping habits, withdrawing from family and friends, asking to stay home from school, damaged or missing belongings. On the other hand, a youngster who bullies may have discipline problems, behave aggressively, express a strong desire to be popular, and frequently try to talk his way out of blame.♥

Myth: If my child is bullied, she should fight back.

Fact: Your youngster could get hurt if she fights back. She may also be disciplined for fighting at school, even if she didn't start it.

What to do: Help your child practice safe ways to respond that won't give the person doing the bullying the reaction he wants. She could say something like "I won't hang around while you talk to me like that." Or she might simply walk away and join a group of friends. Regardless, she should let an adult know what's going on.♥

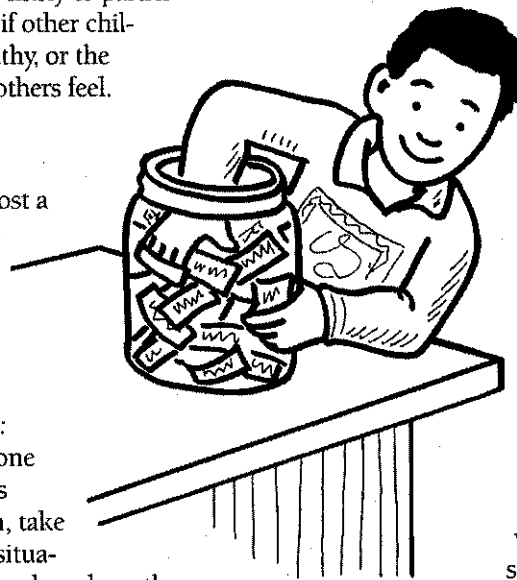


Prevent bullying with empathy

How can you make your youngster less likely to participate in bullying and more likely to step in if other children are targeted? Help him develop empathy, or the ability to understand and care about how others feel. Try these ideas.

Make an empathy jar

How would your youngster feel if he lost a favorite toy? This game will let him practice putting himself in someone else's shoes and recognizing emotions. On small slips of paper, have family members write down situations that would cause different feelings like disappointment, joy, anger, or excitement. *Examples:* "No one wants to play with you." "Someone laughs at your clothes." "Your lost pet has been found." Place the slips in a jar. Then, take turns pulling one out and acting out the situation. Others try to guess what's going on and say how the person feels (*examples:* lonely, excited).



Follow the golden rule

Remind your youngster to treat others the way she wants to be treated. What would she like to have others say and do for her, and what *wouldn't* she appreciate? For instance, she'd probably want to be invited to birthday parties. But it would hurt to hear friends deliberately bragging about parties she wasn't invited to. Anytime she needs to decide if something is a good idea, she can ask herself if she would want the same thing done to her. Say she's tempted to share embarrassing information about a classmate. She should consider whether she'd want the same thing said about her—if not, she should keep it to herself.