

what you

NEED TO KNOW about...

Helping Children and Youth with Bullying Information for Parents and Caregivers

What is bullying?

Bullying is a kind of aggressive behaviour, where a 'bully' tries to hurt or intimidate another person. Types of bullying include:



Physical:
Like hitting, pushing, shoving or tripping the target child.



Verbal:
Like name calling, insults and put-downs.



Social or emotional:
Where a bully tries to exclude or shun the target from activities and peers.



Cyber-bullying:
Where a bully will use email, websites or cell phones to harass the target child with threats or insults.

Can a bully be a victim too?

Yes. It is possible for the same child to be both a bully and a victim. There are also "provocative victims". These are kids who may be awkward, have poor social skills, and whom others may also find annoying. These victims can annoy bullies with negative behaviour and lead a bully to take action.

How do bullies 'get away with it'?

School bullies usually watch out for situations when they know they can get away with bullying. They target children they think won't be protected by others (like children with few or no friends). Bullying is worse when there is not enough adult supervision.

What about 'bystanders'?

Children who are not bullies or victims play an important role. They can maintain bullying or help to stop it. Bystanders have choices about what to do when they see bullying. They can:

- Encourage the bullies,
- Defend the victims,
- Tell adults in charge, or
- Do nothing at all.

How common is bullying?

Many children are victims of bullies at some point in their lives, but only a few are picked on often. Research has shown that these children can't easily "outgrow" the problems caused by being bullied over and over again. Without help, chronic victims are often lonely, unhappy, and depressed for many years after the bullying starts.

How do I know if my child is being bullied?

If your child is being bullied, you may notice that your child:

- **Doesn't talk much about school.** Children who are being victimized may seem unclear or evasive when you ask how the day went.
- **Changes the route to school.** Your child may ask for a drive right to the school entrance to escape from being bullied on the way. If your child walks to school, he may take another route to avoid places where bullies hang out.
- **Has unexplained physical complaints,** like headaches or stomach aches.
- **Seems sad, moody or irritable,** especially after coming home from school.
- **Arrives home hungry or missing things,** because the bully took her lunch, lunch money or other belongings.
- **Acts aggressively towards others,** for example, bullies brothers and sisters.
- **Asks for 'gifts' of money or other items for 'friends' at school.**



Preventing your child from becoming a victim

The best way to help prevent bullying is to do your best to build some of your children's personal strengths early on, so that they are less likely to be bullied.

- **Spend regular, positive time with your child.** This will help to build a close bond, so it will be easier for your child to talk with you. If you talk often with your child, you'll get to know his friends, and it will be easier to pick up on possible bullying.
- **Encourage your child to take part in activities that help her to feel good about herself,** like sports, dance, martial arts, music, drama or arts and crafts.
- **Make sure your child has the opportunity to make friends.** Encourage your child to hang out with school friends after school, on weekends or during the summer. Encourage different circles of friends, in your neighbourhood or through activities, sports or clubs.
- **Give extra help with social and friendship skills if your child needs it.** If you notice that your child has troubles getting along with others, then supervise your child more closely in social situations. You can show and teach your child how to get along with others more easily (listening, taking turns, sharing, being kind). Leaving children alone to simply sort things out on their own doesn't always work.

If you think your child is being bullied....

While you may feel a range of emotions, from being upset and worried to anger and rage that your child is being bullied, it's important to stay calm. It's best to avoid emotional, angry outbursts, because they could make your child afraid to tell you anything more. Your child may not tell you about more bullying because she is worried about overwhelming you and making you upset. You need to make it easy for your child to tell you about bullying.

- **Recognize that bullying is serious and you must do something about it.** Some parents were bullied as children and remember bullying as a normal part of growing up. **It is not!**
- **Talk to your child about your concerns and ask about bullying.** Try asking questions like:
 - What's it like at school?
 - Do you ever get bullied?
 - What happens?
 - Many schools have bullies. Any bullies at your school?
 - How often do you get bullied?
- **If you are pretty sure your child is being bullied,** try asking, "Many schools have bullies. Who's the bully at your school?"
- **Teach your child that telling a trusted adult is the only way for things to get better, and that you can and will help.** It's not always easy for children to talk, because bullies often threaten their victims with retaliation if the child 'tells' adults about the bullying. Your child may be afraid of being a "tattle-tale", feel ashamed or embarrassed. Your child may believe that telling will make things worse or that adults may be unable or unwilling to do anything to help.

If your child is being bullied...

- ✓ **Tell the school and work together.** The best source of help in the early stages of bully-victim problems are professionals who work in the schools, like principals, guidance counsellors, psychologists and social workers.
- x **Don't try to discipline the bully without support from others.** It is not a good idea to discipline other people's children. Think about telling the bully's parents yourself. If bullying is happening at school, tell the school. With bullying that happens other places (like in organized sports), tell the coach or group leaders.
- ✓ **Teach social skills.** Although social skills training by itself probably won't end the bullying, helping your child develop better social skills can help her make more friends. And friends can protect your child from bullying. You can help your child yourself, or you can sign him up for a social skills group. Some schools run these programs and they are also available in the community.
- ✓ **Tell your child to be patient.** Even when adults start getting involved, it's rare for the bullying to just suddenly stop. Even with your child acting more confidently, the bully will keep bullying in the short-run. But eventually, it will get better...
- ✓ **Consider professional help.** If you're feeling overwhelmed, or if you've tried everything you can think of, and things are not getting better, think about seeing a professional. A psychologist, therapist or counsellor may help your child learn how to cope with the bullying and learn new ways of coping to avoid being a victim. But most experts think the direct approach works best, where adults take steps to stop the bullying.

The most important thing you can do is to take direct action to stop the bullying.

Teaching anti-bullying skills

It's essential to teach your child these skills. Adults can't always be around to supervise or stop bullying. And adults can't really force kids to be friends. Your child needs the social skills to make friends, and this will discourage bullies.

Basic social skills:

1 Staying calm, even when being bullied. This is important because many bullies are encouraged to keep bullying when they see their victim get upset.

2 Using assertive body language. Teach your child to look confident by standing tall (not slouching), looking right at the bully (instead of looking down).

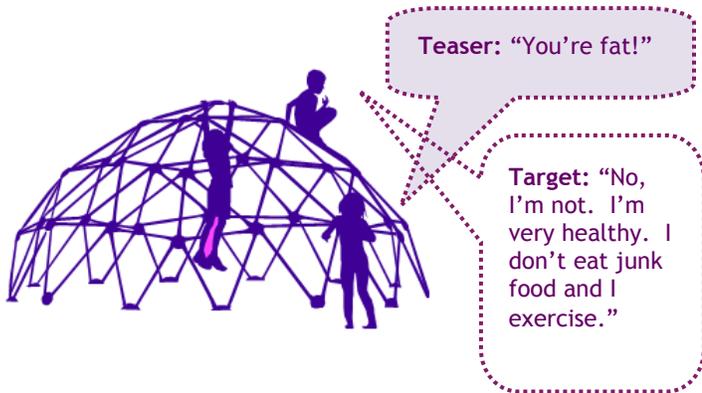
3 Using positive self-talk. Teach your child to say positive things to herself if bullied, like: "Who the heck do you think you are, trying to bully me? I can get through this, I'm not going to let you make me feel bad!"

4 'Listening' to body language. We get our messages across by talking. But we also send strong messages without saying a word. Your child needs to watch for and understand what other's body language is 'saying'. For example, if others are yawning, looking bored and impatient while your're talking, it's probably time to stop talking. If you ignore their body language and keep talking, others probably won't want to spend much time with you. Learning to pay attention to body language will help your child to fit in with others, which will help reduce bullying.

5

Come up with ideas to solve conflicts in different situations.

What to say if someone teases you: The key is to **not** get upset or disagree with the bully. Bullies are even more entertained when their victims get upset or disagree with them. And this just encourages bullies more.



Other ways to handle teasing...



Change the subject:

Target: "Is that a new shirt?"

Thank the teaser:

Target: "Thank you—I'm so glad you noticed! I was getting worried that no one would notice!"

Agree with the teaser, and Turn the put-down into a compliment:

Target: "You're right. I wish I wasn't fat. How do you stay in such good shape? What's your secret?"

Role-plays are a powerful way to teach your child.

1

Ask your child to tell you about specific times that they were bullied:

Ask questions like, "What did the bully say? What did you say? What happened next?"

Common scenarios to role play:

Bully teases your child about being short, tall, fat, thin, smelly, dumb, geeky, wearing glasses...(you get the picture)

2

Reverse roles:

Ask your child to pretend to be the bully, and you can pretend to be your child. Then, as your child 'bullies' you in the role-play, you can model what to say and do.

3

Switch back:

Once your child has had a good chance to learn what to do, switch roles. You can be the bully, and your child can be himself. This way, you can test your child to make sure he knows what to say and do.

If your child witnesses bullying...

Most bullying happens when adults are not around, because most bullies are clever enough to choose their time and place. But even though adults are not around, there are often other children around to witness the bullying.

Even if your child isn't being bullied, being a witness isn't pleasant either. And if your child's friends are bullied, your child and other witnesses will feel badly if they didn't know what to do.

Here's what you can teach your child about bullying:

- **Don't just watch.**

If someone is being bullied, teach your child that it's not OK to just stand there and watch. Children may watch because they are afraid, don't know what to do, or are simply curious. Unfortunately, watching is not helpful. An audience gives a bully power, social status and, most of all, the attention that she seeks.

- **Tell a responsible adult as soon as possible (like a teacher).**

There is a difference between 'tattling' and 'telling'. And it's all in the motive. When you tattle, you're trying to get someone 'in' trouble. When you 'tell', like telling a teacher about bullying, you're trying to get someone 'out' of trouble (the victim).

- **Help out when an adult isn't needed.**

In situations where your child feels it's not serious enough to call a teacher, teach your child what to say to discourage the bully. So let's say a bully is pushing your child's friend around, you might teach your child to say:

- "Hey, back off!"
- "Leave him alone!"
- "Stop being a bully!"

- **Get support from friends.**

Talk to your child's friends, or encourage your child to talk to her friends so that they can stand up for each other if any one of them is bullied.

- **Encourage your child to be kind to the bully's target.**

Other children may avoid the bully's target, because they are afraid of being targeted as well. This just isolates the target and makes it more likely there will be more bullying. Bullies like to pick on people who are isolated. If the target has other friends, it reduces the chance of bullying.



You might be worried that getting involved instead of just watching will put your child at risk for bullying. But in the long run, it will reduce bullying, which will benefit your child in the end. And your child will feel proud and more confident.

If you suspect your child is bullying others...

- **Do not excuse the bullying as normal behaviour.** Bullying is often the first step to more serious problems like skipping school, alcohol/drug use and even criminal activity.
- **Talk with school staff and work together.**
- **Increase supervision.** Ask others about your child's behaviour, rather than waiting for someone to report it.
- **Talk with your child and make it clear that bullying will not be tolerated.** Your child must learn that there is no excuse for bullying. He will only learn this if adults accept no excuses.
- **If there is bullying, act right away.** Your child needs consequences for bullying. Don't punish your child by hitting. It's more effective to take away privileges, like TV, video games or computer for a period of time.
- **Use positive discipline instead of punishing by hitting.** Hitting is not a good way to discipline your child. Your child won't learn much from it, and may soon be as big as you are. Hitting children can create a lot of problems, like bullying. Instead, find consequences that make sense when your child misbehaves. Time-outs work well for young children, and taking away privileges works well with older children.
- **Give praise for caring and respectful behaviours.** Notice when your child is kind, patient and generous. ("I know you want to leave soon-thank you for being so patient").
- **Create opportunities for your child to do good things for others.**
- **Model peaceful ways of solving conflict.** Let your child see you working out a problem with your partner in a positive way. Let your child see you listen to someone else's point of view (even if you don't agree with it). Adults must not encourage any aggression, even by pretending not to see it. Sports coaches must make it clear that they support healthy competition but not bullying. If adults do nothing or say nothing about bullying, children will think that these adults approve of it.

The most important thing you can do is to take direct action to stop the bullying.

How can we prevent bully/victim problems?

Parents, schools and communities must work together to create environments where bullies won't achieve anything by bullying. These steps can help:

1. **Enlist the help of other children who are not directly involved.** Teach them what bullying is and what is wrong with it. Teach them to tell adults right away if they think someone is being bullied.
2. **Teachers, coaches and program leaders should talk with the bully and her family.** This way, the bully finds out that every one knows about the bullying. Consequences for bullying must be brief, non-physical and fit the situation. It may be useful to increase supervision of areas where the bullying happens.

Do school anti-bullying programs work?



Some schools use packaged anti-bullying programs, where teachers, pupils, and parents take part. The most effective programs involve the whole school and community. They often include:

- Making and publicizing school policies against bullying
- School-wide campaigns to raise awareness and encourage children to report bullying
- Training children to be special monitors to resolve conflict if they can or to report problems.

These programs have worked well in some areas but not so well in others. It is a mistake to invest time and energy in programs unless a careful evaluation of the effects of the program is planned.

Where to find help in Eastern Ontario

- In a crisis?** Child, Youth and Family Crisis Line for Eastern Ontario, 613-260-2360 or toll-free, 1-877-377-7775
- Looking for mental health help?** www.eMentalHealth.ca is a bilingual directory of mental health services and resources for Ottawa, Eastern Ontario and Canada.
- Renfrew County:** Phoenix Centre for Children, Youth and Families, with offices in Renfrew and Pembroke. 613-735-2374 or toll-free 1-800-465-1870, www.renc.igs.net/~phoenix
- Leeds and Grenville County:** Child and Youth Wellness Centre, with offices in Brockville, Elgin, Gananoque and Prescott. 613-498-4844, www.cywc.net
- Lanark County:** Open Doors for Lanark Children and Youth, with offices in Carleton Place, Smiths Falls and Perth. 613-283-8260, www.opendoors.on.ca
- To find a Psychologist anywhere in Ontario:** College of Psychologists of Ontario, 1-800-489-8388, www.cpo.on.ca

Where to find help in Ottawa

- Youth Services Bureau**, for ages 12-20, 613-562-3004
- Family Service Centre of Ottawa**, 613-725-3601, www.familyservicesottawa.org
- Catholic Family Services**, 613-233-8418, www.cfssfc-ottawa.org
- Jewish Family Services**, 613-722-2225, www.jfsottawa.com
- The Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario and the Royal Ottawa Mental Health Centre** (by physician referral), 613-737-7600 ext. 2496. For more information on our programs, www.cheo.on.ca
- To find a Psychologist in Ottawa:** Call the Ottawa Academy of Psychology referral service, 613-235-2529. Listing many, but not all, Ottawa psychologists, www.ottawa-psychologists.org/find.htm

Support and Advocacy Groups

- PLEO (Parent's Lifelines of Eastern Ontario)**, a support group for parents of children and youth with mental health difficulties, www.pleo.on.ca
- Parents for Children's Mental Health**, a province-wide organization for parents supporting children and youth with mental health issues, www.parentsforchildrensmentalhealth.org

Want more information?

Useful websites

- The Offord Centre, www.knowledge.offordcentre.com
- Promoting Relationships and Eliminating Violence, www.prevent.ca
- Public Safety Canada, www.safecanada.ca/topic_e.asp?category=28

Books for Adults

- The Bully, the Bullied and the Bystander* by Barbara Colorso, 2002
- Bullying: a Parent's Primer* by Rita Toews

Books for Children and Youth

- The Berenstain Bears and the Bully* by Stan Berenstain, 1993
- How to Handle Bullies, Teasers and other Meanies: A Book That Takes the Nuisance Out of Name Calling and Other Nonsense* by Kate Cohen-Posey, 1995
- Bullies are a pain in the brain* by Trevor Romain, 1997



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Disclaimer: Information in this fact sheet may or may not apply to your child. Your health care provider is the best source of information about your child's health.

Provided by:

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References

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