



# **Making a Difference in Bullying**

**What parents of  
elementary school children need to know**



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## WHAT IS BULLYING?

Bullying is a relationship problem.

Bullying is a form of abuse at the hands of peers that can take different forms at different ages. Bullying is defined as repeated aggression in which there is an imbalance of power between the child who bullies and the child who is victimized (Juvonen & Graham, 2001; Olweus, 1991; Pepler & Craig, 2000). Through our research, we understand bullying as a disrespectful relationship problem:

- Children who bully are learning to use power and aggression to control and distress others
- Children who are victimized become increasingly powerless and find themselves trapped in relationships in which they are being abused.

Read on to learn about how you can make a difference in bullying.

### Is your child being bullied?

#### Sharing these tips with him/her may help

- ♦ If it's hard for you to stand up for yourself, ignore the bullying and walk away...then tell someone who can help.
- ♦ Talk to someone who can help, like a parent, teacher or coach.
- ♦ If you're scared to talk to an adult on your own, ask a friend to go with you.
- ♦ Go to areas where you feel safe.
- ♦ Stay close to students you can count on to stick up for you.
- ♦ Look confident and tell the child who bullies to back off...bullying is NOT cool!
- ♦ Stay calm...try not to show you are upset when being bullied.
- ♦ Get funny...humour shows you're not bothered.
- ♦ Be assertive, not aggressive...fighting back often makes the bullying worse.
- ♦ Remember that no one deserves to be bullied.

## 10 THINGS PARENTS CAN DO TO ADDRESS BULLYING. . .

### CONSIDER YOUR OWN BEHAVIOUR

Children watch what their parents do very closely, which means you have a lot of influence over their behaviour. If they see you being respectful and empathic towards others, they are more likely to act the same way. However, if they watch you being critical or aggressive, how can you expect them to act any differently? Think carefully about the words you choose and the way you behave. Remember, you always have an audience.

### ESTABLISH A CODE OF CONDUCT

Work with your children to develop guidelines, limits, and consequences for acceptable and unacceptable aggressive and bullying behaviour both in and outside of the home. Monitor bullying behaviour between siblings and consistently implement the established consequences. Ensure that all of the caregivers in your child's life follow your guidelines.

### USE CONSEQUENCES THAT TEACH

Consequences should send the message that bullying is unacceptable but also provide support for children who bully to learn the skills they are lacking. For example, if you learn your child has bullied a classmate, he/she may have to spend the weekend at home but uses that time to write a letter of apology or draw a picture of what it feels like to be bullied. Children who bully need help too!

### ENCOURAGE CHILDREN TO REPORT

Given the hidden nature of bullying and the fact that children are usually afraid to come forward, parents often are unaware of bullying situations. Let your children know that you want to hear about every incident of bullying and encourage them to talk to you or another adult they trust. Explain the difference between tattling and telling: *tattling* is what you do to get someone into trouble, *telling* is what you do to get someone out of trouble.

### CATCH CHILDREN BEING GOOD

As a parent, you can encourage positive connections among children by praising respectful and cooperative behaviour whenever you see it. The more you praise a behaviour, the more often it will happen. Children love praise and they will work hard to get it from you. Try and focus on the positives of your child, even when they need correcting. Remember, children are works in progress—they can't always get it right.

## Does your child watch bullying?

### Sharing these tips with him/her may help

- ◆ Talk to someone who can help, like a parent or a teacher...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.
- ◆ Stand up for children who are bullied...they can't do it themselves.
- ◆ Invite kids who are bullied to play with you somewhere else.
- ◆ Comfort the person who was hurt and make it known that what happened was not fair or deserved
- ◆ The best thing you can do for kids who are bullied is to be their friend
- ◆ If it is hard for you to speak out against bullying on your own, ask a friend to do it with you.
- ◆ Help kids who bully, don't hurt them. Speaking out helps, bullying back doesn't help.

## Does your child bully others?

### Sharing these tips with him/her may help

- ◆ Talk to someone who can help, like a parent, teacher, or coach. They can help you find ways to get along with others.
- ◆ Ask a friend to help you stop if you start to bully.
- ◆ Set goals each day to make it easier not to bully (e.g., Keep cool; Today I'll help others rather than hurt them)
- ◆ Understand that you may not like everyone around you but you do have to treat them with respect.
- ◆ Appreciate kids' differences...different doesn't mean worse or better than you.
- ◆ Put yourself in other kids' shoes...would you want to be picked on, put down, or left out?
- ◆ Apologize to the kids you have bullied
- ◆ Know that if other children watch and laugh, it doesn't mean they like it when you bully.
- ◆ Be a leader...Real leaders treat others with respect.

### CREATE FRIENDSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

Having friends and experiencing positive peer interactions in different settings can minimize the impact of bullying. Consider enrolling your child in organized sports, lessons, scouts or guides, and other activities in and out of school so they can experience many different friendships. Make connections with other parents so that children's peer interactions can be monitored.

### GIVE YOUR CHILDREN SCRIPTS

Children who are bullied often have difficulties standing up for themselves. Parents can help them learn this skill by practicing with them what they should say and do in a bullying situation. Children who bully need help with learning different problem-solving skills, managing frustration, and resisting peer pressure to bully. Give children examples of words they should use to ask for things they want or need, as well as how to express their feelings.

### BUILD ON CHILDREN'S STRENGTHS

Children who are bullied often have low self-esteem. Encourage them to participate in activities they enjoy so they can start to feel good about themselves. For children who bully, provide opportunities for them to use their natural leadership skills in a positive way (e.g., teaching siblings and younger children a new sport or skill).

### BE READY TO LISTEN

If your child reports being bullied, be ready to listen right away. Don't put it off. Thank your child for being brave enough to come forward and explain that it is his/her right to feel safe. Ask for details about the incident and convey your concern. Be willing to respond to all reports, even the seemingly trivial ones such as name-calling. Consistency matters!

### BE YOUR CHILD'S CHAMPION

Once your child has come forward, it's your turn to take action. Make connections with the significant adults in your child's life (e.g., teachers, coaches, other parents) to find out if they were aware of the problem and what steps will be taken to ensure the bullying stops. Keep the lines of communication open with your child and encourage him/her to talk to you or any other adult who can help about continuing bullying.

## THE MANY FORMS OF BULLYING IN CHILDHOOD:

### **Physical bullying**

- ◆ Hitting, kicking, shoving, spitting, beating up, stealing, or damaging property

### **Verbal bullying**

- ◆ Name-calling, mocking, hurtful teasing, humiliating or threatening someone, racist or sexist comments

### **Social bullying**

- ◆ Excluding others from the group, gossiping or spreading rumours, setting others up to look foolish, and damaging friendships.

### **Cyberbullying**

- ◆ Using email, cell phones, text messages, and internet sites to threaten, harass, embarrass, socially exclude, or damage reputations and friendships

## HOW DO PARENTS KNOW IF THEIR CHILD IS INVOLVED IN BULLYING?

Bullying is a covert behaviour and is usually hidden from adults. Look for the following clues:

### **SIGNS OF BEING BULLIED**

- Afraid to go to school or other activities
- Appear anxious or fearful
- Low self-esteem and make negative comments
- Complain of feeling unwell
- Lower interest in activities and performance
- Lose things, need money, report being hungry
- Injuries, bruising, damaged clothing or articles
- Appear unhappy, irritable
- Trouble sleeping, nightmares
- Threats to hurt themselves or others
- May appear isolated from the peer group

### **SIGNS OF BULLYING OTHERS**

- Aggressive with parents, siblings, pets, and friends
- Low concern for others' feelings
- Bossy and manipulative behaviour
- Unexplained objects or money
- Secretive about possessions and activities
- Holds a positive view of aggression
- Easily frustrated and quick to anger
- Does not recognize impact of his/her behaviour
- Has friends who bully and are aggressive
- Child has trouble standing up to peer pressure

## WHY PARENTS SHOULD CARE ABOUT BULLYING

Many people feel that bullying is "*just kids being kids*" and that it's "*harmless*." In fact, bullying is anything but harmless.

### **RISKS FOR CHILDREN WHO ARE BULLIED:**

- Depression (low mood, a sense of hopelessness)
- Social anxiety, loneliness, isolation
- Poor health (e.g., headaches, stomach aches)
- Low self esteem
- School absenteeism and academic problems
- Aggressive behaviours
- Contemplating, attempting, or committing suicide

### **RISKS FOR CHILDREN WHO BULLY OTHERS:**

- Not knowing the difference between right and wrong
- Delinquency and substance use
- Academic problems and school drop out
- Adult criminality
- Difficulties in their relationships with others
- Being bullied at the hands of others