

KEEPING KIDS BULLY FREE: TIPS FOR PARENTS

1. If you think your child is being bullied, *ask your child*. Many children won't volunteer this information; they're ashamed, embarrassed, or afraid. Adults need to take the initiative. Ask for specifics and write them down.

If you suspect that your child won't want to talk about being bullied, try approaching the topic indirectly. You might ask a series of questions like these:

- "So, who acts like a bully in your classroom?"
 - "How do you know that person bullies? What does he or she do?"
 - "What do you think about that?"
 - "Who gets picked on most of the time?"
 - "Do you ever get picked on?"
 - "What does [name of student who acts like a bully] say or do to you? How does that make you feel?"
2. If your child tells you that he or she is being bullied, *believe your child*. Ask for specifics and write them down.
 3. Please DON'T:
 - confront the bullying student or the student's parents. This probably won't help and might make things worse.
 - tell your child to "get in there and fight." Kids who bully are always stronger and more powerful than those they choose to target. Your child could get hurt.
 - blame your child. Bullying is never the target's fault.
 - promise to keep the bullying secret. This gives those who bully permission to keep bullying. Instead, tell your child you're glad that he or she told you about the bullying. Explain that you're going to help, and you're also going to ask the teacher to help.
 4. Contact the teacher as soon as possible. Request a private meeting (no students should be around, and ideally no students except for your child should know that you're meeting with the teacher). Bring your written record of what your child has told you about the bullying, and share this information with the teacher. Ask for the teacher's perspective; he or she probably knows things about the bullying that you don't. Ask to see a copy of the school's anti-bullying policy. Stay calm and be respectful; your child's teacher wants to help.



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Ask what the teacher will do about the bullying. Get specifics. You want the teacher to:

- put a stop to the bullying
- have specific consequences in place for bullying, and apply them
- help the bullying student change his or her behavior
- help your child develop bullying resistance and assertiveness skills
- monitor your child's safety in the future
- keep you informed of actions taken and progress made



IMPORTANT: It takes time to resolve bullying problems. Try to be patient. The teacher will need to talk with your child, talk with the child who bullied your child, talk with other children who might have witnessed the bullying, and then decide the best plan of action for everyone involved.

5. Make a real effort to spend more positive time with your child than you already do. Encourage your child to talk about his or her feelings. Ask your child how the day went. Encourage your child's efforts as often as possible. Give your child opportunities to do well—by helping you with a chore, taking on new responsibilities, or showing off a talent or skill.
6. Help your child develop bullying resistance skills. Role-play with your child what to say and do when confronted with bullying. Here are a few starter ideas:
 - Stand up straight, look the other person in the eye, and say in a firm, confident voice, "Leave me alone!" or "Stop that! I don't like that!"
 - Tell a joke or say something silly. (Don't make fun of the person bullying you.)
 - Stay calm and walk away. If possible, walk toward a crowded place or a group of your friends.
 - If you feel you're in real danger, run away as fast as you can.
 - Tell an adult.

Ask your child's teacher or the school counselor for more suggestions. Also ask your child for suggestions. It's great if your child comes up with an idea, tries it, and it works!

7. Consider enrolling your child in a class on assertiveness skills, friendship skills, or self-defense. Check with your child's teacher or community resources—your local public library, YMCA or YWCA, or community education.



IMPORTANT: Self-defense classes aren't about being aggressive. They're about avoiding conflict through self-discipline, self-control, and improved self-confidence. Most martial arts teach that the first line of defense is nonviolence.



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- 8.** If your child seems to lack friends, arrange for him or her to join social groups, clubs, or organizations that meet his or her interests. This will boost your child's self-confidence and develop his or her social skills. Confident children with social skills are much less likely to be bullied.
- 9.** Consider whether your child might be doing something that encourages people to pick on him or her. Is there a behavior your child needs to change? Does your child dress or act in ways that might provoke teasing? No one ever deserves to be bullied, but sometimes kids don't help themselves. Watch how your child interacts with others. Ask your child's teachers for their insights and suggestions.
- 10.** Label everything that belongs to your child with his or her name. Things are less likely to be "lost" or stolen if they're labeled. Use sew-in labels or permanent marker.
- 11.** Make sure your child knows that his or her safety is always more important than possessions (books, school supplies, toys, money). If your child is threatened, your child should give up what the other person wants—and tell an adult (you or the teacher) right away.
- 12.** Encourage your child to express his or her feelings around you. Give your child permission to blow off steam, argue, and state opinions and beliefs that are different from yours. If you allow your child to stand up to you now and then, it's more likely that he or she will be able to stand up to someone who bullies them.
- 13.** Check with your child often about how things are going. Once your child says that things are better or okay at school—the bullying has slowed down or stopped—you don't have to keep asking every day. Ask once every few days, or once a week. Meanwhile, watch for any changes in behavior that might indicate the bullying has started again.
- 14.** If you're not already involved with your child's school, get involved. Attend parent-teacher conferences and school board meetings. Join the Parent-Teacher Association or Organization (PTA or PTO). Learn about school rules and discipline policies. Serve on a school safety committee. If you have the time, volunteer to help in your child's classroom.
- 15.** Remember that you are your child's most important teacher. Discipline at home should be fair, consistent, age-appropriate, and respectful. Parents who can't control their temper are teaching their children that it's okay to yell, scream, and use physical violence to get their way. *Tip:* Many children who bully others come from homes where their parents bully *them*.