



Ten Actions Parents Can Take if Your Child is Bullying Others

Learning that your child is involved in bullying behavior can be a tough blow to any parent. Before you get angry or upset, take a breath. Social skills develop gradually over the school years, and for many children, this includes learning and experimenting with power and relationships. It's important that you work steadily and compassionately to get your child back on track. There's a lot you, as a parent, can do to help your child learn from the situation and become a more productive and supportive part of her peer group. Here are 10 actions you can take today to help create better outcomes for both your child and the kids who were bullied.

1. **Have an honest and firm conversation with your child.** Many children don't fully understand that what they are doing *is* bullying and this it is *not* OK. They may have seen similar behavior in adults, their peers, or on television. Your child needs to hear from you explicitly that it's not normal, OK, or tolerable to bully, to be bullied, or to watch other kids be bullied. Kids need to understand that when they bully their peers, they are doing harm not only to those victims, but also to kids who witness their actions—and even to themselves. Children who repeatedly bully others tend to end up as adults having increased depression, anger, and conflict with other adults—and are more likely to be convicted of a crime. Your child needs your love and care to get back on track.
2. **Make a commitment to help your child find healthy ways to resolve conflict and to stop bullying others.** Start by determining why your child is bullying: is it the draw of social power or status? Or perhaps, a natural temperament that needs more adult regulation, or a case of copying peers? Is it possible your kid's being bullied by others, and is lashing out with proactive behavior to try to keep from getting bullied? A teacher, counselor or mental health professional may be able to help with this process. Once you get a handle on why the bullying is occurring, you can then help your child come up with alternate behaviors or ideas to gain leadership and "social status" that don't involve excluding others or physical and verbal bullying. Provide specific examples from your own experience or from carefully screened books and media. Support your child's efforts to communicate the plan and ideas to teachers and administrators and to implement the plan at school.
3. **Schedule an appointment to talk with school staff including your child's teacher(s) and the school counselor.** Share your concerns. Work together to send clear messages to your child that bullying won't be accepted at home or at school and must stop. Set up a hierarchy of clear consequences that do not involve punishment, but rather actions of apology and new respect towards kids who were bullied. Let your child know that acting with respect and kindness towards others is the true form of power. Always have these conversations modeling calm, gentle and loving ways of speaking.
4. **Develop clear and consistent family rules for behavior and follow through on your child's compliance to those rules.** Your child needs to know the specific behaviors you

expect. Praise and reward the kids who follow rules. Establish appropriate consequences that are not physical or hostile if your child's actions or behavior fails to meet expectations.

Remember, saying nothing sends the message that what your child's doing is OK.

5. **Monitor your child's behavior at home closely.** Immediately and calmly stop any acts of aggression you see against siblings or other children in your home, and talk about other ways your child can deal with sticky situations. Guide your child toward respectful and kind actions within your home environment on a consistent basis.
6. **Your behavior teaches your children how to behave.** Take an honest look at your interactions with other adults inside and outside your home. Work to make changes if your children aren't learning to treat each other with respect by watching you. Do your best to model respectful, kind and empathetic communication and avoid aggressive, intimidating and abusive behaviors—even during disagreements.
7. **Spend time getting to know your child.** Talk about how your kid prefers to spend free time—who does he or she spend time with? What activities are they involved in? If the circle of friends concerns you, work together to help direct your child to a better environment—one that builds on healthy interests and talents. School clubs, music lessons and sports can be great outlets.
8. **Be realistic and patient.** Don't expect any behavior to change overnight. Support your child's efforts to improve, and be there every step of the journey. Keep lines of communication open so your kid has a sounding board, and someone to trust and confide in. Practice role-playing, where you take on the role of children being bullied, and have your child practice talking it out. You can make suggestions for both word choice and tone of voice.
9. **Continue to work and communicate with school staff for as long as it takes.** They should be your allies. If you're not receiving the support and attention your situation requires, escalate the issue through the school and district administration channels.
10. **Don't be afraid to ask for help.** While there's unfortunately not a shot or pill to end bullying behavior in kids, your child's pediatrician can support you in a lot of ways—including making a referral to a mental health professional and other resources available in your community.

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