

Bullying

Parent - Family Newsletter



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Battling Bullies

How to identify and prevent harmful bullying among adolescents

Growing up is hard enough—without adding the stress of being bullied at school. Far from the typical playground pranks, bullying is commonplace in schools across the country today—and some experts believe access to social media sites has made it even worse.

Nearly one in six of all kids in grades 3 through 12 report being bullied at least two to three times a week, according to the largest study ever done on the topic by researchers at Clemson University. Of those students who say they're being picked on, nearly 40 percent of girls and 45 percent of boys say it's been happening in some form—physically, emotionally or verbally—for more than a year.

"Bullying has always been a problem in our schools," says Jennifer DeFranco, marketing director for the state of Illinois' Parent Teacher Association and a well-known speaker on bullying prevention. "But only in recent years have parents and educators come to understand the harmful long-term effects."

The harmful effects

More than 160,000 children nationwide stay home from school every day to avoid bullying, according to the American Federation of Teachers. And the effects of regular bullying reach beyond hurt feelings. Nearly all students who are bullied will experience a range of negative effects such as academic, social, emotional, and physical and mental

health problems. Children who feel targeted are more likely than others to feel depressed and anxious, to have low self-esteem and to think more often about suicide.

Though issues can arise at any age, DeFranco says middle-school and junior-high bullies seem to be the worst. "When bullying happens during those years, it tends to leave the biggest scar on its victims," she says. While the Clemson study showed that bullying decreased as kids got older, the research revealed a heartbreaking truth—that kids who were bullied in high school were the same ones who had suffered torment for years before.



What to do if your child is a victim

Stopping harmful bullying at your child's school starts with adults. As a parent, you are your child's most important advocate, so take it seriously if you suspect your child is a victim of bullying. Telling your child to "let it go" or "suck it up" is never a good idea, as it sends a message that bullying is acceptable.





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How To Know If Your Child Is Being Bullied


Identifying bullying problems is tough for teachers and parents because the conflicts often happen in places without a lot of adult supervision. Plus, students being bullied aren't as likely to report problems out of fear of punishment or even worse—more bullying.


Cyberbullying, which is extremely difficult for parents and teachers to track, is often unreported as well, because victims fear their cell phone and technology privileges might be taken away.

Children are not always vocal about being bullied, but parents should watch for these signs:

 Your child comes home with ripped clothing, and doesn't have a clear explanation about how it happened.

 Your child's grades suffer, and he or she asks to stay home from school on a regular basis.

 Your child experiences nightmares or bouts of crying and overall depression.

 Your child experiences a loss of appetite or an overall behavioral change.

Bullying Prevention

Here are some ways you can help your child face a difficult bully:

Start early. Younger children should be taught the warning signs of bullying, and should be encouraged to learn how to stand up for themselves and their friends. Talking to your child before problems begin is a key step in curbing the troubles during junior-high and high-school years.

Ask questions. Talking about your child's day will strengthen relationships so that your child will feel more comfortable coming to you if there's a problem. The National PTA's bullying prevention program recommends making it a habit to ask about your child's experiences on the way to and from school, what happened at recess and on the playground, lunch time and cafeteria experiences, as well as what happened in the classroom. Know your child's friends and find out how they treat others.

Stay calm. Finding out your child is a victim of a bully is extremely difficult for parents, who want to protect their children's feelings and self-esteem. But staying calm is key, as well as talking to your child about avoiding verbal or physical retaliation. Studies show that bullied children are more likely to bring weapons to school, so parents must do everything to diffuse the situation rather than fuel it.

Get involved. Ignoring the situation won't make it go away, so support your child by letting him or her know that you're going to help stop the bullying. Contact school administrators, counselors and teachers. Help your child carefully document the bullying, citing who, when and where the problems took place. If you don't receive the proper response, send a letter to your school system's superintendent and copy your child's principal.