

Bullying

What to do?

Byron Nogelmeier Sheriff

Your child has always enjoyed learning, but lately seems eager to avoid school or going to the park. Stomachaches and mysterious illnesses pop up in the evening and seem to get worse as the school bus creeps closer to your street the next morning. It's possible the problem has nothing to do with how last night's dinner was digested. Your child could be worried sick over a bully.

Bullies can take the fun out of school or baseball practice and turn something simple like a ride on the bus, stop at a locker, or walk in the park into a scary event that's anticipated with worry all day.

Sadly, bullying is widespread. According to a 2004 KidsHealth KidsPoll, 86% of more than 1,200 9 to 13-year-old boys and girls polled said they've seen someone else being bullied, 48% said they've been bullied, and 42% admitted to bullying other kids at least once in a while.

If your child is a victim of bullying, you can help reduce intimidation and fear by listening and offering to help. If your child is the bully, you'll need to emphasize that this kind of behavior is unacceptable.

Bullying behavior isn't always easy to define. Where do you draw the line between good-natured ribbing and bullying? Although teasing resembles bullying because it can prompt feelings of anger or embarrassment, teasing can be less hostile and done with humor, rather than harm. Teasing often promotes an exchange between people rather than a one-sided dose of intimidation.

Also, despite the common notion that bullying is a problem mostly among boys, both boys and girls bully. But boys and girls can vary in the ways they bully. Girls tend to inflict pain on a psychological level. For example, they might ostracize victims by freezing them out of the lunchroom seating arrangements, ignoring them on the playground, or shunning them when slumber party invitations are handed out.

Boys aren't as subtle and they can get physical. For example, boy bullies are more apt to insult their victims on the playground than ignore them. Instead of isolating a non athletic victim during a gym class dodge ball game, they might take relentless aim and target the child throw after throw.

Why Do Kids Bully?

There are many reasons why kids may become bullies. Bullies frequently target people who are different. Then, they seek to exploit those differences. They choose victims who they think are unlikely to retaliate. That means children who are [overweight](#), wear glasses, or have obvious physical differences like big ears or severe [acne](#) are common subjects for ridicule. But the differences don't have to be

just physical. Children who learn at a different pace or are anxious or insecure can also be targets for bullies.

How to Help if Your Child Is Being Bullied

Being a good listener is one of the best ways to comfort your child. Just talking about the problem and knowing you care can be helpful. Your child is likely to feel vulnerable while discussing bullying and how it makes him or her feel, so it's important to show your love and support.

If you find out that your child is being bullied, don't add to the burden by becoming angry. Although it's understandable to be upset, be careful not to let your child see that. Your sadness could be misinterpreted as disappointment. Be sure to validate your child's feelings - don't minimize them.

You should also reassure your child that he or she isn't to blame. Explain that bullies are often confused or unhappy people who don't feel good about themselves.

Of course, you may have to intervene in persistent cases of bullying. That can involve walking to school with your child and talking to your child's teacher, school counselor, or principal. Safety should be everyone's concern. If you've tried the previous methods and still feel the need to speak to the bullying child's parents, it's best to do so within the context of the school, where a school official, such as a counselor, can mediate.

If Your Child Is the Bully

Learning your child is the bully can be shocking. But it's important to remain calm and avoid becoming defensive, as that can make a bad situation worse. You may have a greater impact if you express disappointment - not anger - to your child.

If you suspect that your child is a bully, it's important to address the problem to try to mend your child's mean ways. After all, bullying is violence, and it often leads to more antisocial and violent behavior as the bully grows up. In fact, as many as one out of four elementary school bullies have a criminal record by the time they're 30. Some teen bullies also end up being rejected by their peers and lose friendships as they grow older. Bullies may also fail in school and may not have the career or relationship success that other people enjoy.

Getting Help for Both Bullies and Kids Being Bullied

A big part of helping your child is not being afraid to ask others for assistance and advice. Whether your child is being bullied or is the one doing the bullying, you may need to get outside help. In addition to talking to your child's teachers, you may also want to take advantage of school counseling services and talk with your child's doctor, who may be able to refer you to a mental health professional.

My office does not receive very many calls with regards to bullies. Most of the bullying is done around the school and the schools in Turner County try to intervene with their own form of discipline. If some does call with a complaint we will intervene and if a crime has been committed such as an assault or disorderly conduct, a report will be taken and the bully will be introduced to the Court system and he or she can try to bully the Judge or the Court Service Officer.

For more information on bullies you can go to
<http://kidshealth.org/parent/emotions/behavior/bullies.html>

Remember don't be a bully and don't be bullied.