

What If Your Child Is Being Bullied?

Whether on the school playground or in the neighborhood park, children in the middle years sometimes find themselves the target of bullies. When that happens, these bullies cannot only frighten a youngster, shaking his confidence and spoiling his play, but they can also cause bodily injury.

Avoiding a bully is one reason your child may be reluctant to go to school. Your child may find him/herself excluded by the bully, afraid of physical harm, or his/her things may be taken by the bully. If you suspect a problem like this, you need to take action to ensure your child's safety and well-being. Here are some strategies he can adopt with your help, and which will help make him safer:

- Tell your child not to react to the bully, particularly by giving in to demands. A bully relishes intimidating others and likes nothing better than to see his victim cry or become visibly upset in other ways. Getting that response reinforces the bullying behavior. Your child should try to keep his composure and simply walk away.
- If your child's attempts at disregarding a bully's taunts aren't effective, he should become assertive with his harasser. While standing tall and looking his tormentor in the eyes, he should clearly and loudly make a statement like, "Stop doing that now. If you keep on, I'm going to tell the teacher." Or, "I'll talk to you, but I'm not going to fight. So put your fists down now." Sometimes, a strong statement will defuse the situation, and the bully will try to find another, weaker target. Drawing the attention of peers to the bullying situation can embarrass the bully. If your child isn't used to reacting assertively, help him rehearse what he will say if he is confronted.

- Encourage your child to form strong friendships. A youngster who has loyal friends is less likely to be singled out by a bully, or at least he'll have some allies if he does become a target of harassment.
- Talk to your son's teacher or to the principal of his school if the situation with the bully persists. You might be reluctant to intervene, perhaps because your child is embarrassed to have you do so, or because you believe he needs to learn to deal with these situations on his own. On the other hand, you don't want your child's self-confidence to weaken, or his physical well-being to be jeopardized. Your youngster deserves to attend school in a safe environment, even if it means both you and the school staff need to become involved.
- Let the principal or teacher talk to the bully when he or she sees the inappropriate behavior taking place on the school grounds. This is generally a more effective approach than having you speak with the child or his parents.

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