

Bullying Warning Signs

Bullying is a concern with children of all ages. Know how to spot the warning signs and how to start a conversation with your child about bullying.

Pay attention to your child's behavior for warning signs of bullying. Keep in mind that a child can engage in bullying and be bullied.

Signs of being bullied

- Unexplainable injuries
- Lost or destroyed clothing, books, electronics or jewelry
- Feeling sick or faking illness
- Difficulty sleeping or frequent nightmares
- Declining grades, loss of interest in schoolwork, or not wanting to go to school
- Self-destructive behaviors such as running away from home, self-harm, or suicidal ideation

Source: *StopBullying.gov*, <https://www.stopbullying.gov/bullying/warning-signs>

Signs of bullying others

- Gets into physical or verbal fights
- Has friends who bully others
- Gets sent to the principal's office or to detention frequently
- Has unexplained extra money or new belongings
- Blames others for their problems
- Doesn't accept responsibility for their actions
- Is competitive and worries about their reputation or popularity
- Is increasingly aggressive—hitting, threatening, screaming

Tips for Starting a Conversation

If you suspect your child is bullied, is bullying, or may be a bystander, start by asking questions.

- How has school been lately?
- What do you think of other kids in your class?
- Are there any kids who get picked on?
- What is lunchtime/recess/homeroom like?

Source: *American Academy of Pediatrics: Bullying: It's Not OK*, <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/safety-prevention/at-play/Pages/Bullying-Its-Not-Ok.aspx>

Helping Your Child Resist Bullying

If your child expresses concern about bullying in their school, you can help them learn behaviors to protect themselves and their classmates.

If your child is being bullied

What to say:

Stay calm. Tell your child it is not their fault, and you will listen and help however you can.

What to teach:

Practice saying, "Stop it," in a calm, firm voice. Use a mirror to practice standing tall and looking unbothered. Ignore the bully by walking away or pretending to text.

What to do:

- Support activities that interest your child. Provide opportunities for your child to socialize with other children.
- Discuss with your child what will make them feel safe. Involve your child in the decision to alert school officials.
- Keep a log of any bullying events that occur.



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If your child is bullying others

What to say:

Model respectful behavior. Explain why bullying is never okay, and how it harms others. Give real examples of the results of your child's actions.

What to teach:

Work with your child to understand some of the reasons they bullied. Help your child make amends by apologizing.

What to do:

- Support activities that interest your child. Provide opportunities for your child to socialize with other children under adult guidance.
- Use consequences that involve learning or building empathy. Assign reading or roleplay scenarios about respecting others and being a good friend.
- Praise acts of kindness and talk about what it means to be a good friend.

Source: *StopBullying.gov*, <https://www.stopbullying.gov/bullying/warning-signs>

If your child is a bystander to bullying

What to say:

Witnessing bullying can have similar mental health consequences as being directly involved. Let your child know that standing up for another child is an act of courage, and to only intervene if they feel they can do so safely.

What to teach:

- Intervene by helping the bullied child get away if you can.
- Interrupt by changing the subject or questioning the bullying behavior.
- Reach out privately to the bullied child to let them know they are not alone. Those who bully are encouraged by attention, so do not actively support it.

What to do:

Model calm and respectful behavior. If you as a parent notice bullying around you, step in immediately. Setting a standard for quick and consistent response sends the message that bullying will not be tolerated.

Resources for starting a conversation

<https://nami.org/Your-Journey/Kids-Teens-and-Young-Adults/Kids/How-to-Talk-to-Your-Child-About-Their-Mental-Health>

Getting Help for Your Child

Most schools have anti-bullying policies in place. Many states have bullying laws and policies. Reach out to a professional, like a teacher, counselor, or your child's pediatrician.

Sample questions for addressing your child's needs in school

What strategies are in place or could be in place to help my child?

Discuss what anti-bullying measures have been used and what is available.

When can we meet again?

Recognize that emails and phone calls/texts can happen between meetings when questions or concerns arise.

May I have a copy?

Make copies for everyone involved. Be ready to maintain a log of any additional incidents and how they were handled.

If your school will not address bullying based on discrimination, you can contact the school superintendent; State Department of Education; U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights; or the U.S. Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division.