



Dealing With Bullies

Bullying is a big problem. It can make kids feel hurt, scared, sick, lonely, embarrassed and sad. Bullies might hit, kick, or push to hurt people, or use words to call names, threaten, tease, or scare them. A bully might say mean things about someone, grab a kid's stuff, make fun of someone, or leave a kid out of the group on purpose. Some bullies threaten people or try to make them do things they don't want to do.

Bullying Is a Big Deal

Bullying is a big problem that affects lots of kids. Three-quarters of all kids say they have been bullied or teased. Being bullied can make kids feel really bad. The stress of dealing with bullies can make kids feel sick.

Bullying can make kids not want to play outside or go to school. It's hard to keep your mind on schoolwork when you're worried about how you're going to deal with the bully near your locker. Bullying bothers everyone — and not just the kids who are getting picked on. Bullying can make school a place of fear and can lead to more violence and more stress for everyone.

Why Do Bullies Act That Way?

Some bullies are looking for attention. They might think bullying is a way to be popular or to get what they want. Most bullies are trying to make themselves feel more important. When they pick on someone else, it can make them feel big and powerful.

Some bullies come from families where everyone is angry and shouting all the time. They may think that being angry, calling names, and pushing people around is a normal way to act. Some bullies are copying what they've seen someone else do. Some have been bullied themselves.

Sometimes bullies know that what they are doing or saying hurts other people. But other bullies may not really know how hurtful their actions can be. Most bullies don't understand or care about the feelings of others.

Bullies often pick on someone they think they can have power over. They might pick on kids who get upset easily or who have trouble sticking up for themselves. Getting a big reaction out of someone can make bullies feel like they have the power they want. Sometimes bullies pick on someone who is smarter than they are or different from them in some way. Sometimes bullies just pick on a kid for no reason at all.

Gemma told her mom that this one kid was picking on her for having red hair and freckles. She wanted to be like the other kids but she couldn't change those things about herself. Finally Gemma made friends at her local swimming pool with a girl who wished she had red hair like Gemma's. The two girls became great friends and she learned to ignore the mean girl's taunts at school.

Bullying: How to Handle It

So now you know that bullying is a big problem that affects a lot of kids, but what do you do if someone is bullying you? Our advice falls into two categories: preventing a run-in with the bully, and

what to do if you end up face-to-face with the bully.

Preventing a run-in with a bully:

Don't give the bully a chance. As much as you can, avoid the bully. You can't go into hiding or skip class, of course. But if you can take a different route and avoid him or her, do so.

Stand tall and be brave. When you're scared of another person, you're probably not feeling your bravest. But sometimes just acting brave is enough to stop a bully. How does a brave person look and act? Stand tall and you'll send the message: "Don't mess with me." It's easier to feel brave when you feel good about yourself. See the next tip!

Feel good about you. Nobody's perfect, but what can you do to look and feel your best? Maybe you'd like to be more fit. If so, maybe you'll decide to get more exercise, watch less TV, and eat healthier snacks. Or maybe you feel you look best when you shower in the morning before school. If so, you could decide to get up a little earlier so you can be clean and refreshed for the school day.

Get a buddy (and be a buddy). Two is better than one if you're trying to avoid being bullied. Make a plan to walk with a friend or two on the way to school or recess or lunch or wherever you think you might meet the bully. Offer to do the same if a friend is having bully trouble. Get involved if you see bullying going on in your school — tell an adult, stick up for the kid being bullied, and tell the bully to stop.

If the bully says or does something to you:

Ignore the bully. If you can, try your best to ignore the bully's threats. Pretend you don't hear them and walk away quickly to a place of safety. Bullies want a big reaction to their teasing and meanness. Acting as if you don't notice and don't care is like giving no reaction at all, and this just might stop a bully's behavior.

Stand up for yourself. Pretend to feel really brave and confident. Tell the bully "No! Stop it!" in a loud voice. Then walk away, or run if you have to. Kids also can stand up for each other by telling a bully to stop teasing or scaring someone else, and then walk away together. If a bully wants you to do something that you don't want to do — say "no!" and walk away. If you do what a bully says to do, they will likely keep bullying you. Bullies tend to bully kids who don't stick up for themselves.

Don't bully back. Don't hit, kick, or push back to deal with someone bullying you or your friends. Fighting back just satisfies a bully and it's dangerous, too, because someone could get hurt. You're also likely to get in trouble. It's best to stay with others, stay safe, and get help from an adult.

Don't show your feelings. Plan ahead. How can you stop yourself from getting angry or showing you're upset? Try distracting yourself (counting backwards from 100, spelling the word 'turtle' backwards, etc.) to keep your mind occupied until you are out of the situation and somewhere safe where you can show your feelings.

Tell an adult. If you are being bullied, it's very important to tell an adult. Find someone you trust and go and tell them what is happening to you. Teachers, principals, parents, and lunchroom helpers at school can all help to stop bullying. Sometimes bullies stop as soon as a teacher finds out because they're afraid that they will be punished by parents. This is not tattling on someone who has done something small — bullying is wrong and it helps if everyone who gets bullied or sees someone being bullied speaks up.

What Happens to Bullies?

In the end, most bullies wind up in trouble. If they keep acting mean and hurtful, sooner or later they may have only a few friends left — usually other kids who are just like them. The power they wanted slips away fast. Other kids move on and leave bullies behind.

Luis lived in fear of Brian — every day he would give his lunch money to Brian but he still beat him up. He said that if Luis ever told anyone he would beat him up in front of all the other kids in his class. Luis even cried one day and another girl told everyone that he was a baby and had been crying. Luis was embarrassed and felt so bad about himself and about school. Finally, Brian got caught threatening Luis and they were both sent to the school counselor. Brian got in a lot of trouble at home. Over time, Brian learned how to make friends and ask his parents for lunch money. Luis never wanted to be friends with Brian but he did learn to act strong and more confident around him.

Some kids who bully blame others. But every kid has a choice about how to act. Some kids who bully realize that they don't get the respect they want by threatening others. They may have thought that bullying would make them popular, but they soon find out that other kids just think of them as trouble-making losers.

The good news is that kids who are bullies can learn to change their behavior. Teachers, counselors, and parents can help. So can watching kids who treat others fairly and with respect. Bullies can change if they learn to use their power in positive ways. In the end, whether bullies decide to change their ways is up to them. Some bullies turn into great kids. Some bullies never learn.

But no one needs to put up with a bully's behavior. If you or someone you know is bothered by a bully, talk to someone you trust. Everyone has the right to feel safe, and being bullied makes people feel unsafe. Tell someone about it and keep telling until something is done.

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