

DECEMBER 2015

Taking Control of Bullying Behavior

Most people have had some experience with bullying. Sadly, it exists in some form on every playground in America. Many of our children have been directly or indirectly involved in bullying. Some have been the victims of bullying, others have observed bullying and some have been the bully. Whatever their place in the bullying scenario, our children need to recognize that they have the *power* to make a positive change in the situation. We can help our children begin to understand bullying behavior and give them strategies and skills that can help them stop bullying that they experience.

Understanding Bullying Behavior

There is no “typical” bully. Individuals who bully come in all shapes and sizes and their reasons for bullying are varied. Some may bully because they feel insecure. For those individuals, harassing someone who they perceive to be weaker in some way may provide them with a feeling of importance or control. Others may bully because they don’t know that it is unacceptable to pick on someone because of differences in size, race or religion, or lack age appropriate social skills. Still others, may bully because of consistent aggressive behavior. Some children bully at school because they are copying behavior that they experience or observe at home. Remember that bullying can be physical or verbal. The use of technology in bullying (i.e. phones, computers, etc.) is increasing and its impact can often be devastating .

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Finding out that your child has been involved in a bullying incident is very upsetting. Whether he/she is the victim of a bully or displaying bullying behavior, it can be shocking and upsetting. In either case, it is important for our children to understand that bullying is not acceptable and will not be tolerated. Use the **Parenting Power Tips** below as you guide your children in developing skills that will help them take control of bullying.

- When your child is bullying others:**
- ◆ **Take it seriously.** Make sure your child understands that you will not tolerate bullying—ever. Establish rules about behavior and be consistent when enforcing them.
 - ◆ **Teach respect and kindness.** Teach your child to have [empathy](#) for those who might be different from them in some way (background, learning style, behavior, skills or abilities)
 - ◆ **Be aware of your child’s social life.** Make sure you are familiar with your child’s friends and be attentive to any changes happening in his/her behavior.
 - ◆ **Encourage positive behavior.** This is a powerful way to change behavior. Notice and praise positive behavior.
 - ◆ **Set a good example.** Be mindful of your interactions with others. Model positive behavior and show your child the positive ways you cope with your feelings.
 - ◆ **Don’t be afraid to seek help.** Sometimes our children are struggling with issues that we cannot handle on our own. When this happens, seek professional help. Seeking positive solutions early will teach your child to ask for help when life becomes too difficult for them to handle on their own.

- When your child is being bullied:**
- ◆ **Teach coping skills.** Encourage your child to use humor or ask questions when confronted by a bully. It’s important to maintain self-control when provoked. This strategy will allow your child to feel more in control of the situation. Role-play various situations so your child is more confident to follow through.
 - ◆ **Encourage social competence.** Create situations where your child can safely practice social skills. Invite friends to your home so you can observe your child’s interactions. Inclusion in a group will help your child feel more comfortable around peers.
 - ◆ **Help your child fit in.** Assist your child in finding age appropriate interests. Individuals who are socially aware are less likely to become targets of bullies.
 - ◆ **Be firm about bullying.** If your child is being bullied at school or during outside activities, involve the supervising adults. Your child may ask you not to make the call, but assure him, that his safety is your top concern and your involvement may help the bully to change his/her behavior.
 - ◆ **Don’t tolerate aggressive behavior in your home.** As a family, agree to use positive and supportive communication.

- When your child witnesses bullying:**
- ◆ **Teach empathy.** Help your child to see the situation through the eyes of both the bully and the victim. Try to understand how each might be feeling. These situations are often more complicated than they seem.
 - ◆ **Encourage safe involvement.** Practice safe ways your child might help to defuse the situation. Supporting the child who is bullied is always helpful. When the situation is more complicated or unsafe, seek adult intervention.
 - ◆ **Identify adults who might help.** Talk about adults your child knows who might be able to help solve the situation. If the bullying is happening at school, perhaps a trusted teacher or counselor. At sport or activities, identify the adult who would be responsible.
 - ◆ **Encourage positive peer interaction.** Our children have the power to impact their peers. Use this month’s [PowerTalk activity](#) to guide you to help your child to be a Positive Peer Influence and practice strategies to avoid Peer Pressure.

December Prevention Principle

Peer behavior, both positive and negative, has a powerful influence on adolescent decision making. When adolescents associate with positive social peers, they are more likely to engage in healthy behaviors and make responsible decisions.