

How to support your child when dealing with a bully



Bullying can look different for everyone who experiences it, from physical aggression to emotional harm to inappropriate behavior online. To find solutions to bullying, parents need to understand its complexities and look out for warning signs. You can't bully-proof the world for your child, but you can support your kid through tough times and help them develop the skills they need to stand up to bullies.

BY THE NUMBERS



About 20% of U.S. youth experience bullying nationally.



It most commonly occurs during middle school, with about 28% of kids reporting bullying between 6th and 8th grades.

WHAT IS BULLYING?

“Bullying involves repeated, unwanted aggressive behaviors by an individual or a group that includes an imbalance of power and often inflicts physical, psychological, or social harm on another child,” explains Maven Mental Health Therapist Janise McNally.

Bullying can look like:

- Physical bodily harm such as hitting or kicking
- Verbal or written threats or name-calling
- Posting damaging content online
- Behaviors that harm relationships or social status, such as spreading rumors

Bullying warning signs:

- Decline in grades
- Not wanting to go to school
- Loss of interest in pleasurable activities
- Unexplained injuries
- “Lost” or destroyed property
- Hiding their screens or visible emotional reactions when they look at their devices
- Changes (increases or decreases) in how much time they are spending on their devices

How to talk to your child if you think they may be bullied

If you see warning signs of bullying, don't ignore them. There may be fear and humiliation associated with reporting or disclosing bullying, so it is important that adults approach bullying with empathy and compassion. The main message to convey? **It's not their fault, and you can work together to formulate a plan.**

Parents can create trust with children by starting open and casual discussions. For example: "I've noticed that you seem stressed/anxious/sad, that you're spending more time alone, that you haven't been eating much—is something going on that is upsetting you?" Listen and communicate that you want to support them.

NEXT STEPS IF YOUR CHILD IS BEING BULLIED

If your child shares an issue, stay calm while you obtain additional details. McNally explains that one reason kids don't disclose is the concern that adults will overreact.

Ask questions such as:

- Have you had problems with this child before?
- Are you concerned it will happen again?
- What do you need in order to feel safe?

During these conversations, take what they're saying seriously and talk about some things your child can do if it happens again.

RESEARCH-BACKED INTERVENTIONS INCLUDE:

- Getting help from a trusted adult or peer
- Being assertive
- If they're able to, avoid the location of the incidents
- Defusing the situation with humor or "owning" comments (unexpected responses such as these can throw off the person doing the bullying)
- Using positive self-talk to avoid internalizing bullying
- Practicing staying calm as strong emotional reactions can be a goal of bullying

If the bullying occurs at school or impacts their education, meet with school staff to determine what interventions and support can be put into place to keep your child safe. If the bullying happens over social media, be proactive about their access to devices by establishing rules about not keeping devices in their bedroom at bedtime and monitoring their accounts. Make sure the conversations with your child are not "one and done." Commit to regular check-ins with your child because bullying may not end overnight, but your support will go a long way.



Through Maven, you can meet with pediatric providers like McNally for bullying support and other parenting needs. Scan the QR code to activate your membership.

