

What You Can Do If Your Child is Being Bullied

Learn how to spot the signs that your child could be being bullied, and what you can do to help.

There are lots of ways you can help your child with bullying. Many children experience bullying, or show bullying behaviour to others. While it is a common problem, it's not something you should ignore or accept as a normal part of life.

Perhaps you've heard these common messages about bullying:

- "Everyone gets bullied at some point. It's just a part of growing up."
- "You should ignore it and they'll soon get bored."
- "It makes a man of you."
- "It never did me any harm."
- "You need to stand up for yourself."
- "It's just teasing."

For a long time, bullying was dismissed as a natural stage of childhood, but it can have a significant impact on children's health and wellbeing and should always be taken seriously.



What is bullying?

Bullying is different to falling out with friends. While it's normal for children to get upset by the occasional mean comment or to feel left out of a game, bullying behaviour is a deliberate decision by the perpetrator.

Bullying is:

- **Intentional:** the behaviour is deliberate and targeted.
- **Repetitive:** it happens frequently and can feel relentless.
- **Powerful:** the person bullying has power over the person being bullied.

Bullying often happens in school and social situations among peers, but it can also be carried out by a stranger, particularly online. The bully may be an adult or have authority, such as a group leader, older sibling, or member of your community.



Signs of bullying

It's hard to tell if your child is being bullied if they choose not to talk to you about it. You might have a nagging feeling that something just isn't right. If you're worried, there are signs you can watch out for to help your child with bullying.

1: Physical signs of bullying:

- Unexplained or hidden injuries, such as bruising, cuts, and scratches.
- Frequent minor illnesses, like headaches and stomach aches.
- Eating problems, including refusing to eat, forced vomiting, or binge eating.
- Problems sleeping.

2: Self-esteem issues:

- Becoming withdrawn from friends and family.
- Loss of confidence.
- Feeling useless or worthless.
- Overly sensitive to criticism.

3: Friendship problems:

- Talking less about their friends.
- Fewer friends coming to visit.
- Socialising less.
- Making excuses not to socialise.



Signs of bullying

4: Behaviour changes:

- Going straight to the bathroom or bedroom when they get home.
- Change in their attitude and grades at school.
- Sudden mood swings and often appearing upset.
- Angry behaviour or lashing out at family members.
- Bullying a sibling.

5: Other problems:

- Losing personal items.
- Damage to their clothes or belongings.
- Asking for money or stealing.
- Changing their usual routines.

If you think your child is being bullied, don't ignore it. They are likely to only ask for your help when they've tried everything else. It's important they feel they aren't alone, even if you can't always solve the problem for them.

Children who show bullying behaviour also need support. Some children who experience bullying themselves can use bullying behaviour towards others.

Talking about bullying

If your child generally chats with you about their everyday life, they're more likely to talk about any problems they're experiencing.

Talk about everyday school life and show how interested you are in how their day has been. Encourage them to talk with you and share their highs and lows.

When you try to help your child with bullying, they may feel reluctant to talk, ashamed about it, or worry it will just make things worse.

They may try to hide bullying or lie about it to avoid upsetting you. Encourage them to talk by staying calm, even if you feel anxious, angry, or upset.

Listen to them without interrupting or trying to find solutions to their problems. Tell them you believe them and thank them for confiding in you. They need to know they've done the right thing by talking to you.

If they are reluctant to speak to you, they may prefer to type or write their problems down. Alternatively, they could speak to a trusted family friend, relative, or designated member of staff at school.



How to help your child with bullying

It's upsetting to find out your child is being bullied. You may feel powerless and unable to intervene, especially if it is happening somewhere you can't control.

It's tempting to encourage them to hurt the bully back or 'stand up' for themselves, but this teaches your child that violence is the way to solve problems.

Bullying at school

If your child is being bullied at school, talk to the school about it. They should have robust policies and procedures to help tackle this.

Often, children feel it will only make things worse if they talk, but ignoring the problem means it won't go away and may get worse in the future.

Getting help

It's important to seek professional help if your child is becoming withdrawn, or you're worried about their emotional wellbeing.

Start by visiting your doctor and sharing your concerns with them. They can refer you on to professional services and signpost relevant support in your area.

