

# Bullying Prevention



According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), one in three children is bullied at some point in their lives, whether it's in school or outside of school.

Bullying can happen anywhere, but some groups may be at an increased risk. Risk factors and strategies for preventing bullying are described below.

## What is Bullying?

Bullying is characterized as:

- Unwanted aggressive behavior
- Observed or perceived power imbalance
- Repetition of behaviors or high likelihood of repetition

Bullying can be either direct or indirect (behind the back) and it can be physical, verbal, relational (destroying reputation) or destructive of property.

## Who is at Risk for Being Bullied?

- Children who are shy or isolated
- Those who are depressed, anxious or who have low self-esteem
- Those perceived as weak or unable to defend themselves
- Those who are perceived as annoying or provoking others, sometimes for attention

## What Families Can Do to Decrease Risk

- Increase positive messages to bolster self-esteem and good mental health.
- Teach acceptance of differences, both within oneself and among others.
- Foster exposure to diversity of culture, appearances, weight, ability/disability; encourage genuine relationships and interaction.
- Teach that everyone has his or her strengths.
- Have children give themselves positive messages that they are loved and worthy from the youngest of ages.
- Involve children with activities and hobbies of their interest to encourage positive identity.

- Speak to your children in advance about what to do if they feel like they are being bullied.

## Decreasing the Risk of Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying can happen through social media, by leaking suggestive or damaging photos, breaking into accounts, pretending to be someone else or spreading rumors online. Statistically, more girls than boys are cyberbullied.

Here are ways to decrease the risk of cyberbullying:

- Keep computer in a common space; avoid having phones and other electronic devices in your child's room.
- Reassure your children that they will not get in trouble and it is not their fault if they are victims of cyberbullying.
- Impose loss of electronic privileges if they pass on mean messages; reward stepping up to protect others.
- Parents should have passwords and access to accounts well into high school; check intermittently, less with later age and responsibility.

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# Bullying Prevention (*continued*)

- Delay social media and email accounts as long as possible, at least into middle school-age 13 or beyond.
- Educate kids not to post anything personal or vulnerable; once sent to even one peer, it is out of the child's control.
- Encourage electronic-free times, especially family meals and a half hour to one hour before bedtime.

## Helping Children Stand Up for Their Peers:

- Remove the audience; tell your children to let the bully know his or her behavior isn't entertaining.
- Suggest that your children make an excuse to get the victim away safely ("Mr. Y was looking for you...").
- Tell your children to consult a trusted teacher, parent or staff person for assistance.
- When your children notice bullying behavior, advise him or her to be nice to the victim at other times and help them feel less alone.
- Address any fears of why they don't want to associate with victims of bullying (e.g., fears of being picked on themselves); encourage pride and earning privileges for this pro-social behavior.

## Who Is at Risk for Being a Bully?

- Children with disruptive behavior disorders, especially those involving impulse control problems, such as oppositional defiant disorder, conduct disorder and ADHD (with hyperactivity-impulsivity)
- Those with overly harsh parents
- Those whose families foster intolerance or racism
- Those whose families condone violence
- Those who are involved with alcohol or drugs, early sexual activity, rule and law violation
- Children who are underachieving
- Children who have many friends, some of whom may also bully

## What Families Can Do to Keep Their Children From Becoming Bullies

- Foster empathy: Everyone has vulnerabilities.
- Parent firmly with a backdrop of unconditional love and acceptance.
- Give consistent consequences for verbally or physically aggressive behavior in a non-emotional manner.
- Practice positive parenting: Give privileges for pro-social problem-solving and controlling one's impulses.
- Improve supervision of children; keep an ear open for relational patterns.
- Work collaboratively with schools to promote a culture of acceptance of differences; demonstrate being a good role model.

Sources:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2014). Bullying fact sheet: [www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention](http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention)

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