

What to Do if Your Child Reports Being Bullied

Thankfully, most instances of reported bullying usually end up being nothing more than peer to peer conflict, a misunderstanding, lack of empathy, or a simple miscommunication. It is important to gather as much information as possible before choosing to label an incident 'bullying,' or a student a 'bully.' Remember, bullying is associated with repeated behavior that is deliberately meant to cause someone to feel uncomfortable, or cause emotional or physical harm.

Sadly, bullying does occur. Sometimes children can deal with bullying on their own, or with the help of their friends, but sometimes they will need an adult, either their parents, or teachers, or coach, to stop the bullying. In the majority of cases, once the bullies have been spoken to about the bullying, the bullying will stop. Don't be afraid to call the school, the coach, group leader, or even the parents of the bully if it happens outside of an organized activity.

One of the things children who are being bullied have in common is a lack of assertiveness. Here, adults can model assertiveness by taking care of it promptly. Never tell your child to ignore the bullying, this only implies that you are going to ignore it!

If your child reports to you that they have been bullied:

- Go to the school's website, and complete the 'Bullying Checklist' to see if what you are dealing with is in fact a case of bullying and not something else.
- Calmly talk with your child about their experience. Ask lots of questions but be careful how and what you ask. The word bullying is overused and is a serious issue. 95% of all incidents reported are peer conflict as opposed to real cases of bullying. Gather as much information as possible.
- Make a note of what your child says-in particular who was said to be involved, how often the bullying has happened, where it happened and what has happened.
- Reassure your child that they have done the right thing to tell you about the bullying.
- Continue to reinforce the importance of having your child respond to name calling, rude gestures, etc. by letting the other person know how it makes them feel and that the behavior is expected stop. The use of 'I' statements is effective. For example, "When you call me ugly, I feel bad, or it makes me feel sad or it makes me feel angry. Please don't call me that anymore."
- Explain to your child that if any further bullying happens, they must report it to the adult in charge immediately.
- Contact the adult who was in charge of supervising the child, whether that be the coach, group leader, teacher, bus driver, or the parents of the bully.

When talking with the other adult:

- Stay calm, the other adult may have no idea that your child is being bullied, or heard a different version of the story.
- Be as specific as possible about what your child says happened: dates, times, who was involved.
- If you are talking with the parent of the bully, ask the parent to get their child's version and get back to you. Discuss how problems can be avoided in the future.
- Make a note of what action will be taken.
- Remember, that most of the time bullying will stop once it has been "found out". Also keep in mind, that some students who are accused of being a bully need a lot of help themselves and it can take time for them to learn from their mistakes.