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## **Bullying: Help your child handle a school bully**

By Mayo Clinic staff

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## **Bullying: Help your child handle a school bully**

**Childhood bullying can have lifelong consequences. Listen to your child's concerns. Then help your child create a plan to stop bullying in its tracks.**

By Mayo Clinic staff

Bullying was once considered a childhood rite of passage. Today, however, bullying is recognized as a serious problem. Up to half of all children are bullied at some point during their school years, according to the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry. And thanks to tech-savvy kids, cyberbullying and other forms of electronic harassment are now commonplace.

To help your child handle school bullying, learn to recognize it — and know how to respond.

## **Types of bullying**

Any child can be bullied, particularly younger children and those who have few friends or are easily intimidated. At any age, bullying can take many forms. For example:

- Physical bullying includes hitting, punching, kicking and other types of physical harm, as well as destruction of a child's property.
- Verbal bullying includes teasing, name-calling, taunting and racial slurs, as well as spreading gossip or malicious rumors.
- Cyberbullying includes harassing emails, instant messages and text messages, as well as intimidating or threatening websites, blogs or posts.

## **The consequences of bullying**

Children who are bullied may be afraid to go to school. They may complain of headaches or stomachaches and have trouble concentrating on schoolwork. In the long term, the consequences of bullying may be even more severe. Children who are bullied have higher rates of depression, anxiety, low self-esteem and other mental health conditions. Children who are bullied are more likely to think about suicide. Some of these wounds may linger into adulthood.

## **Warning signs of bullying**

If your child is being bullied, he or she may remain quiet out of fear, shame or embarrassment. Be on the lookout for these warning signs:

- Damaged or missing clothing or other personal belongings
- Unexplained bruises or other injuries
- Few friends or close contacts
- Reluctance to go to school or ride the school bus
- Poor school performance
- Headaches, stomachaches or other physical complaints

- Trouble sleeping or eating

## What to do if your child is being bullied

If you suspect that your child is being bullied, take the situation seriously:

- **Encourage your child to share his or her concerns.** Remain calm, listen in a loving manner and support your child's feelings. Express understanding and concern. You might say, "I understand you're having a rough time. Let's work together to deal with this." Remind your child that he or she isn't to blame for being bullied.
- **Learn as much as you can about the situation.** Ask your child to describe how and when the bullying occurs and who is involved. Ask if other children or adults have witnessed any bullying incidents. Find out what your child may have done to try to stop the bullying.
- **Teach your child how to respond to the bullying.** Don't promote retaliation or fighting back against a bully. Instead, encourage your child to maintain his or her composure. He or she might say, "I want you to stop now," and then simply walk away. Suggest sticking with a friend or group of friends while on the bus, in the cafeteria or wherever the bullying seems to happen. Remind your child that he or she can ask teachers or other school officials for help.
- **Contact school officials.** Talk to your child's teacher, the school counselor and the school principal. If your child has been physically attacked or otherwise threatened with harm, talk to school officials immediately to determine if the police should be involved. Don't contact the bully's parents yourself. You might also want to encourage school officials to address bullying — including cyberbullying — as part of the curriculum.
- **Follow up.** Keep in contact with school officials. If the bullying seems to continue, be persistent.
- **Boost your child's self-confidence.** Help your child get involved in activities

that can raise self-esteem, such as sports, music or art. Encourage your child to build friendships and develop his or her social skills.

- **Know when to seek professional help.** Consider professional or school counseling for your child if his or her fear or anxiety becomes overwhelming.

If your child is being bullied, remember that early intervention can help prevent lasting problems — such as depression, anxiety and low self-esteem. Don't leave your child to handle it alone. Your child needs your support now more than ever.

#### References

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