

What Parents Can Do To Prevent Bullying

Addressing the signs of bullying early, before the behaviour and its impact get worse, is important to creating a safe and caring school and community.

As a parent, you can help to prevent bullying by teaching your children how to:

- be caring of others
- get along
- deal with angry feelings
- be assertive without being aggressive in standing up for themselves

Children need to understand how important it is to report bullying. Parents can help by encouraging children to talk about what is happening at school, in their neighbourhoods, on the bus, etc.

As well, it is important to teach children the difference between telling and tattling.

- Tattling is reporting to an adult about someone else's behaviour in order to get them in trouble.
- Telling is reporting to a responsible adult about someone else's behaviour in order to help someone – themselves or someone else.

As the parent of a secondary school student, you will continue to monitor and supervise your child's activities. Aside from representing your children, your role will be to help them build the skills to act on their own behalf. When something goes wrong at school, they need to know where they can turn for guidance and support, and what action to expect. Parents and families can help children understand the importance of reporting harassment and guide them through the complaint and investigation process.

Listen carefully to your child

Young children may be reluctant to report bullying, or may not even recognize it. They may think:

- they will suffer retaliation
- the problem isn't that bad, it's part of life
- they do not want to be seen as a ratter or tattler
- you, as the adult, will make the situation worse
- even with your help, they will not be protected
- the bullying is their fault

Many secondary school students are reluctant to have their parents and families involved. They may think:

- you will make the situation worse
- even with your help their concerns will be ignored by the school
- they will suffer retaliation
- the problem isn't that bad
- they can handle the problem themselves

Children will talk about the harassment when they know you will listen and help. As you listen and talk to your child, the conversation will help you determine your level of involvement. Consider the following questions:

- Does my child need my help or protection?
- How can I help my child stay safe?
- What information do I need?
- Where can I go for help?

Decide how you can help

When your child's safety or ability to function at school is affected, intervention is vital. How you intervene is just as important. When talking to your child about reporting the situation, explain the difference between “ratting” and “reporting.” Ratting or snitching is a negative label used by the harasser to discourage children from reporting. It takes courage to report. Reporting is done to help keep someone safe.

When your child is the victim

Work with your child to bolster confidence and find ways to deal with the problem. By the time you know that your child is being bullied, it is likely that he or she has tried many ways to solve the problem. Standing up to a harasser may make things worse. Talk to your child about how the incident could be reported.

If your child is the victim of bullying, encourage him/her to report it as soon as possible. Parents of primary/elementary students should contact the school as soon as possible. If your child is older, you may wish to discuss with them how you will proceed. Your child's teacher, guidance counsellor and/or principal are able to work with you to determine:

- Who will look into your complaint, and when
- When will that person get back to you
- What information can you expect
- How will the school, now that it is aware of the problem, keep your child safe while the problem is being investigated (for example, supervision of the alleged bully)
- How will your child's identity and privacy be protected to prevent retaliation
- What services are available in the school or school district should your child need emotional or psychological support

You may request:

- An immediate investigation of the situation
- A commitment that retribution for making the complaint will not occur, or will be dealt with immediately should it occur
- A plan of action to prevent further bullying of your child and others
- Appropriate counselling for your child to deal with the effects of the bullying
- Information about outside agencies (e.g., police, mental health) if referral is appropriate
- A transfer, if the fear of bullying is preventing your child from attending school

You and your child may also request (and will want to request in more serious cases):

- A person of your choice to accompany you to all meetings
- Information on how the investigation will be kept confidential
- Minutes of all meetings

Gather support outside the school

The school has the primary responsibility to act on your child's concerns about safety within the school setting. When and how the school involves outside agencies depends on how the school views the severity of the incidents. It also depends on the relationships and protocols your school/district has developed with outside agencies. If at any time you believe your child is in danger, make a report directly to your local police. It helps to have a written record of the incidents and your actions to solve the problem.

When your child is the bystander

Encourage your child to report bullying and practice skills that will help them develop the confidence to speak up. Many elementary school students are reluctant and fearful to step in when they see someone else being bullied. They may believe:

- The bully will turn on them
- They will make it worse for the victim
- The situation may get worse and they will get into trouble
- There will be no support or action from other students or from the adults

Bullying affects everyone. It is up to everyone to create safety at school. Silence only makes the problem worse.

When you encourage your child to report bullying, make sure the same safeguards are in place for your child as for the victim. Your child's teacher, guidance counsellor and/or principal are able to work with you to determine:

- Who will look into your complaint, and when?
- When will that person get back to you?
- What information can you expect?
- How will the school, now that it is aware of the problem, keep your child safe while the problem is being investigated (for example, supervision of the alleged bully)?
- How will your child's identity and privacy be protected to prevent retaliation?
- What services are available in the school or school district should your child need emotional or psychological support?

When your child is the bully

Your child and the school need your support to effectively address bullying, and to provide a safe place for all students and staff. You can help by remaining calm and working with the school to find out why your child bullies others. You may also work with your child to find ways to make amends to the victim. Remember, it is not your child who is unacceptable; it is the behaviour. Support your child in seeking fair treatment during any investigation or discipline process. Schools are encouraged to try alternatives to out-of-school suspensions.

If an investigation or discipline (including suspension) takes place, you should know that:

- The school must provide curriculum missed to suspended students under 16 years of age.
- There may be services available to your child, such as a psychological assessment or referral to an outside agency that will help your child recognize the seriousness of the behaviour and keep it from happening again.
- Your child can choose a parent or other support person to be present at all meetings and interviews.
- You should be informed of the appeal procedure.

Whether your child is a victim, bully or bystander, programs may be available in your school district to help. These may include:

- bully prevention
- anger management
- conflict resolution
- restorative justice
- mentoring
- school counselling
- peer counselling
- peer mediation
- social responsibility programs