

# SIGNS OF BULLYING AND TIPS FOR PARENTS

*Tips from Dr. Abramson, Pediatric Psychologist at Children's Hospital Colorado*

## Not all bullying has physical signs. What other signs should parents look for if they suspect their child is being bullied?

Kids may occasionally not want to go to school because of minor problems with school work or the other kids. Parents should be concerned if they see that their child doesn't want to go to school or outright refuses to go to school. This sometimes shows up as physical complaints, like headaches or an upset stomach. If you notice this happening with your child, it's time to start asking questions.

## What can parents do to help prevent bullying?

- **Open communication:** Make sure your child knows they can talk to you about anything, big or small and that you'll listen with an open mind. Kids need to know that you'll hear them out, and that they can talk about problems with friends and others. Work hard to listen closely without rushing your child, and without talking over them. Talk to them about bullying before it comes up as a problem. Make sure they know your rules for how to treat other people, and how they should expect to be treated by others.
- **Know your child's friends and their parents:** Get to know other parents. Having a group of parents that are friendly makes sure that adults can keep tabs on what might be going on in a circle of friends. This may be especially important if your child is making new friends, switching schools, or showing early signs of having problems with other kids.
- **Keep in close communication with school personnel.** Make sure school personnel know that you care not only about how your child is doing academically, but also how they are doing socially and emotionally. Check in often to make sure that your child is being a good friend, treating others with respect, and is shown kindness by others.

## How can we as parents make sure that we are setting good examples for our kids on how to act and how to keep from becoming a bully?

- All children watch their parents and treat other people the same way their parents do. Even if you think your teenager, for example, ignores what you're doing, they actually are watching, learning and following your example. Treat others with care, concern and kindness all the time but especially in front of your children. If you show respect and manners in how you interact with others, whether you know them or not, your children will do the same.

- If you're hostile, belittling or unkind, your child will act that way when you're not around and bully other kids. Treating others with respect in front of your children will leave a lasting impression and will help shape kind and gentle kids, as well as considerate and polite adults.
- It's important to have a peaceful household for raising happy, healthy and successful children. People often don't realize that sibling conflict can cause lasting harm and dismiss it as "kids being kids." In fact, hostility between siblings isn't at all innocent and can have a long-term impact. Don't put up with bullying or aggression between siblings.

## Is Your Child a Bully?

While it is important to watch for signs that your child may be a victim of bullying, it is equally important to find out if your child is being a bully, it's our responsibility as parents to make sure that our own children are treating others with respect and kindness.

### What should I do if I think my child is a bully?

#### Pay Attention!

- Pay attention to how your child interacts with other children. Listen to their conversations. If you don't like how they're speaking about someone, it's important for you to speak up and learn more information.
- Make sure you teach your child what is and isn't appropriate behavior for their age.
- Be a detective and cast a wide net to know how your child is doing socially and interpersonally. Talk to your children's teachers, get to know their school administrators, be a familiar face and you will be first to know if a problem is starting to arise.
- Children are often very concrete and some have trouble telling humor from hostility. Help your child know when a joke is "just a joke," versus when an attempt at humor is actually unkind and harsh. Set clear and consistent expectations.

### How Kids Can Help

#### What can a kid do if they see someone being bullied?

- Most of the time, children are aware of problems with bullying long before adults find out. Teach your child how to notice signs of bullying, and let them know how they can work to address it.
- Make sure your children feel comfortable and confident telling an adult. Encourage them to alert their teacher, coach, counselor or other responsible adult as soon as they notice inappropriate interactions. Kids need to know that it is the job of adults to supervise and step in, so that they don't feel pressure to intervene.
- Encourage your child to reach out and be a friend to the child who was being bullied. Motivate your child to experience the good feeling that comes with doing a good deed.