

what you

# NEED TO KNOW about...

## Helping Children and Youth with Bullying Information for Parents and Caregivers

### What is bullying?

Bullying is a kind of aggressive behavior. The 'bully' tries to hurt or intimidate another person. Types of bullying:



**Physical:**  
Involves the use of physical aggression, hitting, kicking, punching, shoving, tripping the target child, or destroying the target child's belongings.



**Verbal:**  
Involves saying hurtful things, name-calling, insults, laughing about weaknesses, and put-downs.



**Social or emotional:**  
Involves hurting the target child's relationships by excluding, ignoring, spreading hurtful rumours, getting others not to be friends with this child, negative facial expressions and body language.



**Cyber-bullying:**  
Involves the use of technology (such as cell phones, social media, and the Internet) to hurt the target child with text messages, social networking sites, email, and/or posting of embarrassing pictures or videos online.

### Can a bully be a victim too?

Yes. It is possible for the same child to be both a bully and a victim. There are also "provocative victims". These are kids who may be awkward, have poor social skills, and whom others may also find annoying. These victims can annoy bullies with negative behaviour and lead a bully to take action.

### How do bullies 'get away with it'?

School bullies usually watch for situations where they know they can get away with bullying. They target children whom they think won't be protected by others. (For example, they target children with few or no friends). Bullying is worse when there is not enough adult supervision.

### What about 'bystanders'?

Children who are not bullies or victims can play an important role. They can watch bullying or help to stop it. Bystanders have choices when they see bullying. They can:

- Encourage the bullies
- Defend the victims
- Tell the adults in charge, or
- Do nothing at all.

### How common is bullying?

Many children are victims of bullies at some point in their lives, but only a few are picked on often. Research has shown that these children can't easily "outgrow" the problems that were caused by being repeatedly bullied. Without help, chronic victims are often lonely, unhappy, and depressed for many years after the bullying starts.

## How do I know if my child is being bullied?



If your child is being bullied, you may notice that your child:

- **Doesn't talk much about school or fears going to school.**  
Children who are being victimized may be unclear or evasive when you ask how the day went.
- **Changes routines.** Your child may ask for a drive right to the school entrance to escape from being bullied on the way. If your child walks to school, he may take another route to avoid places where bullies hang out. Changes in the child's pattern of computer or cell phone use.
- **Has unexplained physical complaints or injuries,** like headaches, stomach aches or sleep difficulties.
- **Seems sad, moody or irritable,** especially after coming home from school.
- **Arrives home hungry or missing things,** because the bully took her lunch, lunch money or other belongings.
- **Acts aggressively towards others,** for example, other students, adults or pets.
- **Asks for 'gifts' of money or other items for 'friends' at school.**
- **Differences in the child's usual behavior.** Decreased interest in previously enjoyable activities, low self-esteem, threats or attempts at self-harm, easily frustrated and/or quick to anger.

## Preventing your child from becoming a victim

The best way to help prevent bullying is to do your best to build some of your child's personal strengths early on, so that they are less likely to be bullied.

- **Spend regular, positive time with your child.** This will help to build a close bond, so it will be easier for your child to talk with you. If you talk often with your child, you will get to know his/her friends, and it will be easier to pick up on possible bullying.
- **Encourage your child to take part in activities that help him/her to feel good about him/herself,** like sports, dance, martial arts, music, drama or arts and crafts.
- **Make sure your child has the opportunity to make friends.** Encourage your child to hang out with school friends after school, on weekends or during the summer. Encourage different circles of friends, in your neighbourhood, or through activities, sports or clubs.
- **Give extra help with social and friendship skills if your child needs it.** If you notice that your child has trouble getting along with others, then supervise your child more closely in social situations. You can show and teach your child how to get along with others more easily (for example, by listening, taking turns, sharing, being kind). Leaving children alone to sort things out on their own doesn't always work.

## If you think your child is being bullied....

If your child is being bullied, you may feel a range of emotions - from being upset and worried, to anger or rage. But it's important to stay calm. It's best to avoid emotional, angry outbursts because these could make your child afraid to tell you more. Your child may not tell you about more bullying because s/he is worried about overwhelming you and making you upset. You need to make it easy for your child to tell you about bullying.

- **Recognize that bullying is serious and you must do something about it.** Some parents were bullied as children and remember bullying as a normal part of growing up. **It is not!**
- **Talk to your child about your concerns and ask about bullying.** Try asking questions like:
  - What's it like at school?
  - Many schools have bullies. Any bullies at your school?
  - Do you ever get bullied? What happens?
  - How often do you get bullied?
- **If you are pretty sure that your child is being bullied,** try asking, "Many schools have bullies. Who's the bully at your school?"
- **Teach your child that telling a trusted adult is the only way for things to get better, and that you can and will help.** It's not always easy for children to talk, because bullies often threaten their victims with retaliation if the child 'tells' adults about the bullying. Your child may be afraid of being a "tattle-tale", or feel ashamed or embarrassed. Your child may believe that telling will make things worse, or that adults may be unable or unwilling to do anything to help.

## If your child is being bullied...

- ✓ **Tell the school and work together.** The best source of help in the early stages of bully-victim problems are professionals who work in the schools. For example: principals, guidance counsellors, psychologists and social workers.
- ✗ **Try not to discipline the bully.** It is not a good idea to discipline other people's children without their permission. Instead, think about telling the bully's parents about their child's behaviour. If the bullying is happening at school, tell the school. When bullying happens in other places (such as organized sports), tell the coach or group leaders.
- ✓ **Teach social skills.** Although teaching your child better social skills may not end the bullying, it can help her make more friends. Friends can help protect your child from bullying. You may want to do this social skills training yourself, or sign your child up for a social skills group. Some schools run these programs. Or they may be available in your community.
- ✓ **Tell your child to be patient.** Even when adults become involved, it's rare for the bullying to stop at once. Although your child may begin acting more confidently, the bully may keep bullying in the short-run. But eventually, it will get better...
- ✓ **Consider professional help.** Most experts think the direct approach works best, where adults take steps to stop the bullying. But you may be feeling overwhelmed or that you've tried everything - and things are still not getting better. If so, think about seeing a professional. A psychologist, therapist or counsellor can teach your child new ways of coping. Or how to avoid being a victim.

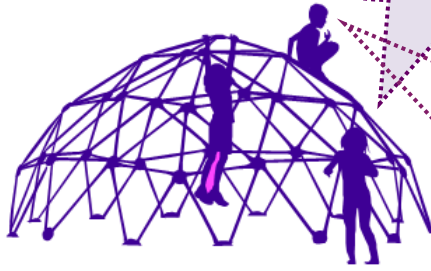
The most important thing you can do is to take direct action to stop the bullying.

## Teaching anti-bullying skills

It's essential to teach your child these skills. Adults are not always there to supervise or stop bullying. Adults also cannot force kids to be friends. Your child needs social skills to make friends. This will discourage bullies.

### Basic social skills:

- 1 Staying calm, even when being bullied.** This is important because many bullies are encouraged to keep bullying when they see their victim get upset.
- 2 Using assertive body language.** Teach your child to look confident by standing tall (not slouching), and looking right at the bully (instead of looking down).
- 3 Using positive self-talk.** Teach your child to think positive things if bullied, such as: "Who do you think you are, trying to bully me? I can get through this. I'm not going to let you make me feel bad!"
- 4 'Listening' to body language.** We get our messages across by talking. But we also send strong messages without saying a word. Your child needs to watch for, and understand, what another person's body language is 'saying'. For example: if others are yawning or looking bored and impatient while you're talking, these are cues for you to stop talking. If you ignore others' body language and keep talking, they will not want to spend much time with you. Learning to pay attention to body language will help your child to fit in with others. This will help reduce bullying.
- 5 Come up with ideas to solve conflicts in different situations.**  
**What to say if someone teases you:** The key is to **not** get upset or disagree with the bully. Bullies are often entertained when their victims get upset or disagree with them. And this just encourages bullies more.



Teaser: "You're fat!"

Target: "No, I'm not. I'm very healthy. I don't eat junk food and I exercise."



Teaser: "Nope, you're fat alright. Hey everyone, check out fat Albert!"

### Other ways to handle teasing...

Teaser: "You're fat!"



Change the subject:

Target: "Is that a new shirt?"

Thank the teaser:

Target: "Thank you—I'm so glad you noticed! I was getting worried that no one would notice!"

Agree with the teaser, and turn the put-down into a compliment:

Target: "You're right. I wish I wasn't fat. How do you stay in such good shape? What's your secret?"

Role-plays are a powerful way to teach your child.

# 1

**Ask your child to tell you about specific times that they were bullied:**

Ask questions like, "What did the bully say? What did you say? What happened next?"

# 2

**Reverse roles:**

Ask your child to pretend to be the bully, and you can pretend to be your child. Then, as your child 'bullies' you in the role-play, you can model what to say and do.

# 3

**Switch back:**

After your child has had a chance to learn what to do, switch roles. You can be the bully, and your child can be himself. This way, you can test your child to make sure he knows what to say and do.

**Common scenarios to role play:**

Bully teases your child about being short, tall, fat, thin, smelly, dumb, geeky, wearing glasses... and so on.

## If your child witnesses bullying...

Most bullying happens when adults are not around. This is because most bullies are clever enough to choose their time and place. But even if adults are not around, other children may be there to witness the bullying.

Your own child may be a witness, rather than a victim, of bullying. But being the witness isn't pleasant either. If he saw another child being bullied, your child would feel badly if he didn't know what to do.

## Here's what you can teach your child about bullying:

- **Don't just watch.**

If someone is being bullied, teach your child that it's not OK to just stand there and watch. Children may watch because they are afraid, don't know what to do, or are simply curious. Unfortunately, watching is not helpful. An audience gives a bully power, social status and, most of all, the attention that she or he seeks.

- **Tell a responsible adult as soon as possible (like a teacher).**

There is a difference between 'tattling' and 'telling'. And it's all in the motive. When you tattle, you're trying to get someone 'in' trouble. When you 'tell', like telling a teacher about bullying, you're trying to get someone 'out' of trouble (the victim).

- **Help out when an adult isn't needed.**

In situations where your child feels it's not serious enough to call a teacher, teach your child what to say to discourage the bully. If a bully is pushing your child's friend around, you might teach your child to say:

- "Hey, back off!"
- "Leave him alone!"
- "Stop being a bully!"

- **Get support from friends.**

Talk to your child's friends, or encourage your child to talk to his or her friends. Ask the friends to stand up for each other if any one of them is bullied.

- **Encourage your child to be kind to the bully's target.**

Other children may avoid the bully's target, because they are afraid of being targeted as well. This just isolates the target child and makes it more likely that there will be more bullying. Bullies like to pick on people who are isolated. If the target has other friends, it reduces the chance of bullying.



You might be worried that getting involved instead of just watching will put your child at risk for bullying. But in the long run, it will reduce bullying. This will benefit your child in the end. And your child will feel proud and more confident.



## If you suspect your child is bullying others...

- **Do not excuse the bullying as normal behaviour.** Bullying is often the first step to more serious problems such as skipping school, alcohol or drug use, or criminal activity.
- **Talk with school staff and work together.**
- **Increase supervision.** Ask about your child's behaviour, rather than waiting for someone to report it.
- **Talk with your child and make it clear that bullying will not be tolerated.** Your child must learn that there is no excuse for bullying. She will only learn this if adults accept no excuses.
- **If there is bullying, act right away.** Your child needs consequences for bullying – but not physical discipline. It's more effective to take away TV or video games for a period of time.
- **Use positive discipline instead of punishing by hitting.** Hitting is not a good way to discipline your child. Your child won't learn from it, and may grow to be as big as you are – and overpower you. Hitting children can lead them to become bullies or have other problems. Instead, parents should find consequences that make sense when a child misbehaves. Time-outs or "calm down time" work well for young children, and taking away privileges works well with older children.
- **Give praise for caring and respectful behaviours.** Notice when your child is kind, patient and generous. ("I know you want to leave soon, but thank you for being so patient").
- **Create opportunities for your child to do good things for others.**
- **Model peaceful ways of solving conflict.** Let your child see you working out a problem with your partner in a positive way. Let your child see you listen to someone else's point of view (even if you don't agree with it). Adults must not encourage any aggression, even by pretending not to see it. Sports coaches must make it clear that they support healthy competition but not bullying. If adults do nothing or say nothing about bullying, children will think that these adults approve of it.

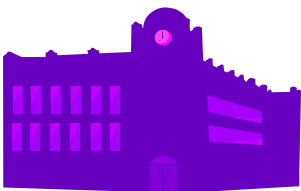
The most important thing you can do is to take direct action to stop the bullying.

## How can we prevent bully/victim problems?

Parents, schools and communities must work together to create environments where bullies won't achieve anything by bullying. These steps can help:

1. **Enlist the help of other children who are not directly involved.** Teach them what bullying is and what is wrong with it. Teach them to tell adults right away if they think that someone is being bullied.
2. **Teachers, coaches and program leaders should talk with the bully and his/her family.** This way, the bully finds out that everyone knows about the bullying. Consequences for bullying must be brief, non-physical and fit the situation. It may be useful to increase the supervision of areas where the bullying happens.

## Do school anti-bullying programs work?



Some schools use packaged anti-bullying programs in which teachers, pupils, and parents take part. The most effective programs involve the whole school and community. They often include:

- Making and publicizing school policies against bullying
- School campaigns to raise awareness and help children to report bullying
- Training children to be monitors to resolve or report conflict or problems



These programs have worked well in some areas but not so well in others. It is important to have a plan for how to evaluate the program's results *before* investing time and energy into developing it.

## Where to find help in Nova Scotia

- To find a Psychologist anywhere in Nova Scotia: Association of Psychologists of Nova Scotia, 902-422-9183, [www.apns.ca](http://www.apns.ca)
- Bullying Hotline: 8am-8pm, Call 902-490-SAVE(7283), text 902-233-SAVE(7283) or email [bullyhotline@halifax.ca](mailto:bullyhotline@halifax.ca)
- Kids Help Phone, 1-800-668-6868, [www.kidshelpphone.ca](http://www.kidshelpphone.ca)
- CyberScan Investigation Unit, Investigation team specializing in cyberbullying, 902-424-6990 (within HRM) or 1-855-702-8324, [www.cyberscan.novascotia.ca](http://www.cyberscan.novascotia.ca)

## Where to find help in Halifax Regional Municipality

- IWK Mental Health & Addictions, offers programs for ages up to 19, 902-464-4110 or toll-free 1-888-470-5888 (ask to be connected to Central Referral), [www.iwk.nshealth.ca/mental-health](http://www.iwk.nshealth.ca/mental-health)
- Laing House, offers programs for ages 16 to 30 living with a mental illness, 902-425-9018, [www.lainghouse.ca](http://www.lainghouse.ca)
- Healthy Minds Cooperative, offers resources for peer support, [www.healthyminds.ca](http://www.healthyminds.ca)
- Capital Health Addictions & Mental Health Program, offers programs for ages 19 and up, [www.cdha.nshealth.ca/addictions-and-mental-health-program](http://www.cdha.nshealth.ca/addictions-and-mental-health-program)

## Want more information?

### Useful websites

- Get Cyber Safe, [www.getcybersafe.gc.ca](http://www.getcybersafe.gc.ca)
- Anti-bullying Nova Scotia, [www.antibullying.novascotia.ca](http://www.antibullying.novascotia.ca)
- Promoting Relationships and Eliminating Violence, [www.prevnet.ca](http://www.prevnet.ca)
- Youth Beyond Blue, [www.youthbeyondblue.com](http://www.youthbeyondblue.com)
- eMental Health, [www.eMentalHealth.ca](http://www.eMentalHealth.ca)
- Bullying.org, [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org)
- Pacer's National Bully Prevention Centre, [www.pacer.org/bullying](http://www.pacer.org/bullying)
- Teen Mental Health, [www.teenmentalhealth.org](http://www.teenmentalhealth.org)
- Stomp Out Bullying, [www.stompoutbullying.org](http://www.stompoutbullying.org)
- Need Help Now, [www.needhelpnow.ca](http://www.needhelpnow.ca)

## Want more information?

### Books for Adults

- The Bully, the Bullied and the Bystander* by Barbara Colorso, 2002
- Bullying: a Parent's Primer* by Rita Toews
- Bullying Prevention: What Parents Need to Know* by W. Craig, D. Pepler, J. Cummings & contributions from researchers at PREVNet, 2013

### Books for Children and Youth

- The Berenstain Bears and the Bully* by Stan Berenstain, 1993
- How to Handle Bullies, Teasers and other Meanies: A Book That Takes the Nuisance Out of Name Calling and Other Nonsense* by Kate Cohen-Posey, 1995
- Bullies are a pain in the brain* by Trevor Romain, 1997

**Authors:** Written by Dr. Barry Schneider, Psychologist, University of Ottawa and reviewed by members of the Mental Health Information Committee at the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario (CHEO), and reviewed by members of the Child and Youth Mental Health Information Network ([www.cymhin.ca](http://www.cymhin.ca)). Adapted with permission by the IWK Health Centre, Halifax. Thanks to Sylvia Naumovski and Sarah Cannon, Parents for Children's Mental Health, [www.parentsforchildrensmentalhealth.org](http://www.parentsforchildrensmentalhealth.org)

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**Disclaimer:** Information in this fact sheet may or may not apply to your child. Your health care provider is the best source of information about your child's health.

Provided by:

### References

Olweus, D. (2001). Peer harassment: A critical analysis and some important issues. In J. Juvonen & S. Graham (Eds.), *Peer harassment in school: The plight of the vulnerable and victimized* (pp. 3-20). New York: The Guilford Press.

Mental Health & Addictions Program, IWK Health Centre, Halifax, NS PL-0875 Last Update: 07/14; Next Review: July 2017



902-464-4110 Central Referral  
Fact sheet originally developed by the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario, adapted with permission

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