

# How to Identify and Deal with Bullying

Bullying causes a significant amount of harm to thousands of children each year. Although bullying is a situation parents hope their children won't have to address, the reality is that it may be encountered. Bullying can manifest itself in several forms, physical hitting, verbal teasing, and even cyber bullying. Whatever the form, bullying can result in hurt feelings, a bruised sense of self-esteem, or physical injury.

**You can help your child handle a bully. Here are some tips to consider:**

- 1. Encourage your child to behave in a confident manner.** People who carry themselves with confidence are less likely to be targets for bullies. Encourage your child to use body language to send a message of confidence. Instruct them on how to carry their body—head held high, back straight, look people in the eye are some examples.
- 2. Learn to identify the key signs of bullying:**
  - Having few friends or sudden changes in friends at school
  - Being afraid to go to school, ride the bus, or take the usual path home
  - Coming home with unexplained cuts, bruises, torn clothing, items stolen
  - Loss of interest in school, usual activities and/or sudden drop in grades
  - Loss of appetite, headaches, stomach problems, trouble sleeping
  - Feeling of depression, anxiety, withdrawal, aggression
- 3. Continually monitor your child's behaviors and actions and encourage open, honest discussion of their feelings.** Ask direct questions about how peers treat them and their friends. Even if your child isn't being bullied, continue to regularly discuss the issue. This will prepare them in case they are faced with or become witness to an act of bullying in the future. From time to time (and pending your child's age), ask them to share their texts and/or Facebook page with you.
- 4. If your child tells you that they are being bullied, take them seriously.** Listen to what they have to say about the bully and their tactics. Provide support. Don't blame, criticize or get overly emotional. Reassure them that they were right to tell you about the problem.
  - Report the incident to school officials to make sure the appropriate course of action is taken.
  - If your child encounters a bullying situation while at school, encourage them to privately discuss the incident with a teacher, counselor, social worker, psychologist or other trusted adult, even if asking for help has not worked in the past. Instruct them to calmly and clearly explain the situation, be persistent, and use concrete statements such as, "this is important," "I really need your help," "I do not feel safe," etc.
  - Talk to your child about why an individual may bully. Explain that children often use bullying as a way to deal with their own problems and insecurities. Inform them that bullying may bring a child a sense of power or excitement, be a result of their inability to manage anger, or be the modeling of behaviors that they have personally experienced. Reinforce to your child that even though they may not be able to control another child's actions, they can control their own.
  - Assist your child with "self talk." Have them make a list of positive personal attributes, such as "I'm smart," "I'm talented," "I'm thoughtful," etc. This will help them take the power out of hurtful words from a bully.
  - Let your child know it's ok to use their voice in a bullying situation. Words such as "no" or "stop" can be used to take charge of a situation and establish personal boundaries. Instruct your child to keep their emotions under control, look the bully in the eyes, and speak calmly, clearly and firmly. Encourage them to always act positively, no matter how difficult it is.
  - Remind your child that yelling and talking back can make the problem worse as it's the reaction the bully is looking for.
  - Help your child practice what to do by role-playing difficult bullying scenarios. Confidently handling a bully is not easy, and may not come naturally for your child. Help them identify strategies for dealing with a bully and the positive, appropriate responses for each situation. Provide feedback on their responses, actions, body language, tone of voice, etc.

*Tips provided by Barrington Youth & Family Services (BYFS), a non-profit mental health agency providing services for Barrington area youth and their families residing within the boundaries of Barrington Community Unit School District 220.*

*BYFS offers counseling and youth outreach programming that addresses bullying issues. For more information, visit [www.barringtonyouthandfamilyservices.org](http://www.barringtonyouthandfamilyservices.org) or call 847.381.0345.*

