

Bullying Age 12 Summary

Why Bullying?

Since about one in five children/teens (21%) report experiencing bullying at some point, helping your child/teen learn to understand and deal with bullying behavior is important for their success in school and life.¹

Tip These steps are done best when you and your child/teen are not tired or in a rush.

Tip Intentional communication and a healthy parenting relationship support these steps.

STEP

1



Get Your Child/Teen Thinking by Getting Their Input

- Engage your child/teen in a conversation to understand their thoughts and feelings. You could ask: *"How do the peers around you make you feel?"* "What's your definition of bullying?" "What would you do if you felt bullied?" "What would you do if you saw someone else being bullied?"
- Practice active listening. The best way to find out whether or not your child/teen is being bullied is by offering a safe space for them to talk about their upset without fearing judgment. Often, a child/teen needs to feel safe before they will talk about their upset. Be patient as they ultimately get to that part of the conversation.
- Paraphrase what you hear your child/teen say: "James grabbed my notebook in study hall last week; yesterday he pushed me in the hallway; and today he threatened to hit me. I don't know what to do." Parent modeling paraphrasing: "I hear that James took your notebook away from you, then pushed you another day, and then today threatened to hit you. I hear you were scared. I imagine you were also hurt and humiliated in front of others, like when he pushed you."
- Is it a one-time event? If so, it's not bullying. Are there regular or ongoing interactions that are hurting your child/teen? Do they sound like words or actions intended to belittle and dominate?

**STEP
2****Teach New Skills**

- Teach your child/teen what to say and do if they are being bullied.
 - Teach your child/teen to be brief, speak up, and walk away to safety.
 - Secure a safety buddy. Have your child/teen find a friend and talk about how to easily and simply stand up for one another and walk away to safety.
 - **CAUTION:** If your child/teen has been dangerously threatened with severe harm, call the school and involve the teacher, the school psychologist, or the vice principal -- someone at the school level who will take it seriously and pursue the issue immediately. All schools, by law, are supposed to have an anti-bullying policy with a straightforward procedure for dealing with it. Severe harm can be identified if there is a weapon or threat of a weapon involved, if hate has been voiced (racism, homophobia), serious bodily harm has already occurred or been threatened, sexual abuse or threat of, or illegal acts are involved such as robbery, destruction of property, or bribery.
- Teach your child/teen how to be an advocate against bullying and unkind behavior.
 - Model constructive language. Would you be upset if your child/teen repeated what you were saying to someone else in public? If your answer is yes, it's time to rethink and rephrase what you are saying or try not to say it.
 - Cultivate sibling kindness. Create chances for siblings to appreciate one another. At dinnertime, ask, *"What did you notice your sister do today that was kind?"*
 - Learn strategies that promote responsibility instead of resorting to yelling and/or punishment.
 - Advocate for your child's/teen's emotional safety. Do not allow a relative, neighbor, or friend to criticize or demean your child/teen. Remove them and set a boundary with the adult.

Tip More than half of bullying situations (57%) stop when a peer intervenes on behalf of the bullied student.²

Trap DO NOT encourage your child/teen to fight back with words or fists. Do not model a verbal attack inadvertently by criticizing the attacker. A hurtful retort (referencing character, calling names) could escalate the conflict and put your child/teen in immediate danger. Hold back on your comments, even if they fly through your mind, and keep your child/teen safe. Contact school authorities immediately if your child/teen is in physical danger. Coaching your child/teen to fight back will lead them into harm's way.

**STEP
3****Practice to Grow Skills and Develop Habits**

- Use “Show me...” statements like, *“Show me how you would tell someone to stop their mean words.”*
- Use “I notice...” statements like, *“I notice how you stand tall when you say ‘Stop!’ That’s excellent!”* or *“I notice how you’ve been practicing what you’ll say and do. That’s excellent!”*
- Accept feelings: *“I hear you’re upset. What can you do to help yourself feel better? How can we examine ways to take action?”*
- Appreciate your child/teen when they share information with you. For example, you could say, *“I appreciate it when you talk with me about how things are going at school.”*
- Practice deep breathing. Because deep breathing is such a simple practice that can assist your child/teen anytime, anywhere, mainly if they are scared or nervous, it’s important to get in plenty of practice to make it easy to use when needed.
- Include reflection on the day in your bedtime routine. Ask: *“What happened today that made you happy?”* or *“What were the best moments in your day?”*

**STEP
4****Support Your Child’s/Teen’s Development and Success**

- Ask key questions: *“You are going to see Julie today. What are some of the things you can do to assert yourself and get away if you need?”*
- Reflect on outcomes: *“Seems like you couldn’t sleep last night because you felt bad about how Julie acted in the hallway. Tell me more. What about trying out some role plays tonight so you can go in tomorrow knowing what you can say and do?”*
- Stay engaged. Working together on ideas for new and different coping strategies can offer additional support and motivation for your child/teen when challenging issues arise.

**STEP
5****Recognize Efforts**

- No matter how old your child/teen is, your positive reinforcement and encouragement have a significant impact.
- You can reinforce your child’s/teen’s efforts in many ways. It is essential to distinguish between three types of reinforcement – recognition, rewards, and bribes. These three parenting behaviors impact your child’s/teen’s behavior differently.
 - **Recognize** even small successes to promote positive behaviors and expand confidence: *“You talked with your classmate about what was bothering you -- that must have taken a lot of courage- Excellent!”* Recognition can include nonverbal acknowledgment such as a smile, high five, or hug.
 - **Rewards** can be helpful in certain situations by providing a concrete, timely, and positive incentive for doing a good job. A reward is determined ahead of time so that the child/teen knows what to expect, like *“If you follow your plan to have lunch with your safety buddy, we will stop for a treat on the way home from school.”* (if you XX, then I’ll XX) The goal should be to help your child/teen

progress to a time when the reward will no longer be needed. Rewards can decrease a child's/teen's intrinsic motivation if used too often.

- Unlike a reward, **bribes** aren't planned ahead of time and generally happen when a parent is in the middle of a crisis (like a child/teen arguing and refusing to leave a social gathering. To avoid disaster, a parent offers to stop for ice cream on the way home if the child/teen will stop arguing and leave the event). While bribes can be helpful in the short term to manage stressful situations, they will not grow lasting motivation or behavior change and should be avoided.
- Build celebrations into your routine. For example, *"Let's try out a few role plays and then put our worries away and enjoy snuggling up to a good book."* Or, after your child/teen shares important information with you about how things have been going at school, take a walk together.

References

1. National Center for Education Statistics. (2016). Indicators of School Crime and Safety: 2016. U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved from <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2017/2017064.pdf>

2. Hawkins, D.L., & Pepler, D.J. (2001). Naturalistic observations of peer interventions in bullying. Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing.

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