

Bullying Age 9 Summary

Why Bullying?

Since more than one in five children (21%) will experience bullying at some point, helping your child 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 are not tired or in a rush.

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

STEP 1  **Get Your Child Thinking by Getting Their Input**

- Engage your child in a conversation to understand your child's thoughts and feelings. You could ask: *"How do the peers around you make you feel? If you feel bad about someone, what makes you feel that way?"*
- Practice actively listening to your child's thoughts, feelings, and worries. Give them a safe space where they can talk about their feelings without judgement. Often, a child needs to feel safe before they will talk about their upset. Be patient as they ultimately get to that part of the conversation.
- Listen for and reflect thoughts and feelings. For example: *"I hear you were scared. Were you 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? Do they sound like words or actions intended to belittle and dominate?

STEP 2  **Teach New Skills**

- Teach your child what to say and do if they are being bullied.
 - Teach your child to be brief, speak up, and walk away to safety.
 - Secure a safety buddy. Find a friend and talk about how to easily and simply stand up for one another. Lock your arms and walk away to safety.
 - Coach your child on what to say. As the bullying child approaches, your child can say: *"Stop! You know you are wrong!"* Then, walk 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 who will take it seriously and pursue the issue immediately. All schools, by law, are supposed to have an anti-bullying policy with a clear procedure for dealing with bullying. 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 to be an advocate against bullying and unkind behavior:
 - Model constructive language. Would you be upset if your child repeated what you were saying to someone else in public? If the 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 did today that was kind?"*
 - Learn strategies that promote responsibility instead of resorting to yelling and punishment.
 - Advocate for your child's emotional safety. Do not allow a relative, neighbor, or friend to criticize or demean your child. Remove your child and set a boundary with the adult.
 - Practice social and emotional skills at home. Take your child with you instead of running to help a neighbor alone.

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 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 in immediate danger. Hold back on your comments, even if they fly through your mind, and keep your child safe. If your child is in physical danger, contact school authorities right away. Coaching your child to fight back will lead them into harm's way -- by the hand of the attacker AND in getting caught and reprimanded by the school.



Practice to Grow Skills and Develop Habits

- Use "Show me..." statements like *"Show me how you would tell someone to stop their mean words."*
- Accept feelings: *"I hear you're upset. What can you do to help yourself feel better? How can we examine ways to take action?"*
- Recognize effort: *"I notice how you've been practicing what you'll say and do. That's excellent!"*
- Practice deep breathing.

- Include reflection on the day in your bedtime routine: “*What happened today that made you happy?*” or “*What were the best moments in your day?*”



Support Your Child'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 needed?*”
- Learn about development. Each new age will present different challenges.
- Reflect on outcomes: “*It seems like you couldn't sleep last night because you felt bad about how Julie acted at recess. 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 trying out new and different coping strategies can offer additional support and motivation.



Recognize Efforts

- No matter how old your child is, your positive reinforcement and encouragement have a significant impact.
- There are many ways you can reinforce your child's efforts. It is essential to distinguish between three types of reinforcement – recognition, rewards, and bribes. These three distinct parenting behaviors have different impacts on your child's behavior.
 - 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 recognition 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 knows what to expect, like “*If you follow your plan to play with your safety buddy at recess, 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 progress to a time when the reward will no longer be needed. If used too often, rewards can decrease a child's internal motivation.
 - Unlike a reward, **bribes** aren't planned ahead of time and generally happen when a parent is in the middle of a crisis (like in the grocery store checkout line and a child is having a tantrum. To avoid disaster, a parent offers to buy a sucker if the child will stop the tantrum). 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.*” Include hugs in your repertoire of ways to appreciate one another.

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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