

Bullying Q&A's

Jack sits quietly at lunch while his friends laugh at a classmate who has a learning disability. Katie doesn't want to go to school because she says other girls tease her about her glasses. On the basketball court, Christopher and his buddies repeatedly trip a younger boy.

These children are all affected by bullying. And whether your child is a witness, a victim, or a bully, it's likely that she has been touched by the problem at some point, too. So what can a parent do? Here are answers to common questions about bullying.



Q My son and his friends tease each other a lot. Is that bullying?

A Playful teasing that takes place among friends usually isn't considered bullying. A good friend knows if his buddy has had

enough and no longer thinks the joking is funny. Bullying, on the other hand, is mean spirited and is not a joke to the victim. In addition, a bully is persistent and has an advantage over his victim. For instance, he might be bigger, older, or more popular. Examples of bullying include making threats, name calling, pushing, or punching. All these behaviors—verbal and physical—should be taken seriously.

Q I've been hearing a lot about bullying lately. Is it more frequent these days?

A Although it's not clear that bullying is on the rise, it's true that the problem is getting more attention as we learn about its serious consequences for both bullies and victims. For instance, youngsters who bully other children are more likely to get into trouble with the law as adults. And victims can suffer from poor grades, increased school absences, lack

of self-confidence, or depression. In the most extreme examples, bullying has been linked to violent behavior or suicide.

Q Why do kids bully each other?

A Experts used to believe that most bullies had low self-esteem and that they hurt others to feel better about themselves. While this does happen, it is also common for popular children to be bullies. They're motivated by social power, and they take advantage of less popular kids to gain even more power. For instance, a well-liked youngster might decide who gets to jump rope during recess or where other kids can sit at lunch. On the other hand, a less popular child might bully others in an effort to gain more friends. If a classmate doesn't do what she says, she might push her or call her names.



Q What should my youngster do if she witnesses bullying?

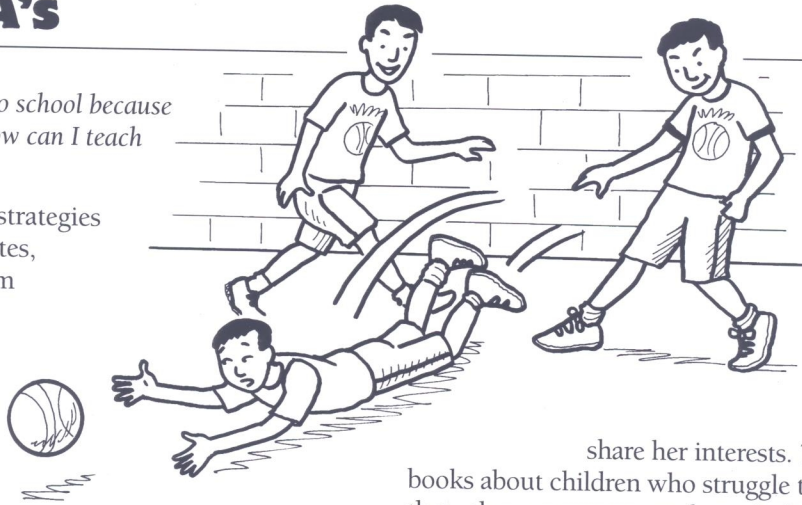
A Bullies love a crowd, so the best thing your child can do is to pay attention to the victim and ignore the bully. If someone is being physically attacked, your youngster should tell the nearest adult. If a classmate is being teased, your child might walk up and ask the child to play. Let your youngster know that you understand it takes courage—but if she stands up to a bully, others might, too. *Tip:* Be sure to explain the difference between reporting a bully and tattling: telling is to help get someone *out* of trouble, and tattling is to get someone *in* trouble.

continued

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Q My son doesn't want to go to school because kids make fun of his weight. How can I teach him to stand up for himself?

A While your son can learn strategies for standing up to his classmates, bullying isn't usually a problem that a youngster can handle alone. He will probably need adult help to solve the problem in the long run. Consider calling or meeting with his teacher or school counselor. She might suggest a support group or an older student—a bullying “survivor”—who can share his experiences with your child. In the meantime, tell your son that most bullying takes place when adults aren't looking, and help him plan ahead. (“Who are you going to play with at recess today?” “Where will you sit on the bus?”) Finally, tell your son to think “SAFE”: Say what you feel, Ask for help, Find a friend, Exit the area. When someone bullies him, he can try one or more of those strategies. For example, he might say, “I don't want to hear this,” and walk away.



way?”) It's likely that your youngster is being excluded from a clique that she wants to be a part of. You can gently suggest that she make friends with children who treat people kindly. Also, she could attend an after-school activity to find friends who

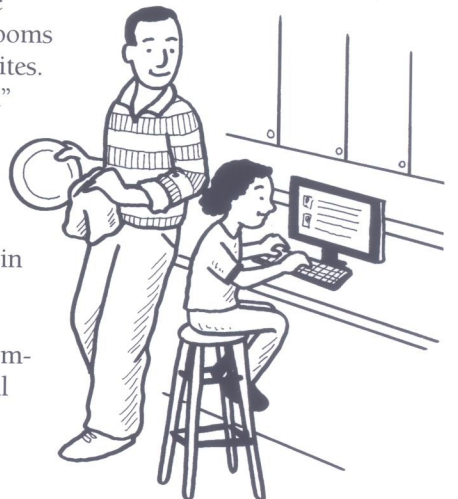
share her interests. *Tip:* Ask a librarian for books about children who struggle to make friends. Knowing that other youngsters go through the same thing can help her feel less alone, and she can read about ways to build friendships.

Q I overheard my son and his friends threatening another child at the playground. How should I handle this?

A Ask your son how he would feel if he was the child being threatened. Let him know that his behavior is unacceptable, and tell him what the consequences will be if it continues. Also, help your youngster become more empathetic by talking regularly about others' feelings (“Your brother is disappointed that his football team lost, so let's try to cheer him up”). Look around for role models (“That actor helped rebuild houses for people who were in a flood”). Also, consider getting involved in community service as a family. Your son might read to children at a shelter, serve food in a soup kitchen, or walk for a cause like autism or cancer research.

Q I know that cyberbullying is a big problem among older kids. Do I need to worry about it now?

A Keeping an eye on your child's online activities is one of the best ways to prevent cyberbullying. If you have a computer at home, keep it in a common area (kitchen, living room) rather than in your youngster's bedroom. Also, consider writing a list of rules for using the Internet. For example, your daughter might not be allowed to visit chat rooms or social networking sites. You might “bookmark” a list of safe sites and tell her she can't visit other pages without your permission. And explain that if she ever sees something that upsets her or makes her uncomfortable, she should tell you right away.



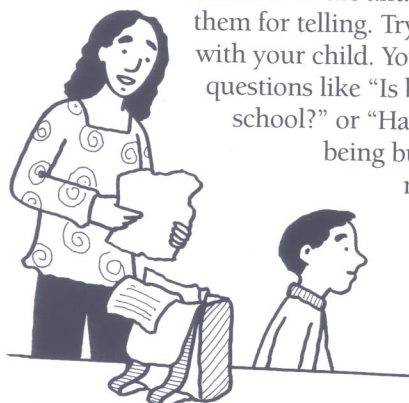
Q How will I know if my child is being bullied?

A Youngsters often keep bullying a secret because they are ashamed or are afraid the bully will punish them for telling. Try bringing up the subject with your child. You can ask him general questions like “Is bullying a problem at your school?” or “Have you ever seen anyone being bullied?” Also, know the risk factors—children who are overweight, have a disability, or are perceived as different are often targets. Finally, be aware of the warning signs. Keep in mind

that you might not see bruises. More frequently, a victim will avoid favorite activities, ask to stay home from school, misbehave, lose belongings with no explanation, or come home with torn or messed-up papers or books.

Q My daughter has been unhappy lately. She finally told me it's because her classmates don't want her around. Is there anything I can do?

A When a child is repeatedly left out on purpose, it is a form of bullying. First, ask specific questions to learn what is going on. (“Where is this happening?” “Who is treating you this



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