
Why Do Some Children Bully Others? Bullies and Their Victims

Is bullying serious?

Bullying is often considered to be a part of growing up. Many men and women remember being the victim of a bully. Others remember being the bully.

Research shows that bullying is common among children. It is often vicious and cruel. Bullying is an early form of aggressive, violent behavior. About 16 percent of students in the United States are involved. Of those, seven percent are the bullies and nine percent are the targets of the bullies.

By 24 years-of-age, 60 percent of bullies have criminal records. In comparison to other children, bullies grow up to have more arrests for drunk driving, domestic violence and child abuse.



Why do children bully others?

Research shows bullies are aggressive children. They view violence as an okay way to interact with other children.

Some bullies think children will harm them, so they fight to defend themselves or to show they're strong. Many bullies are impulsive and active. Some are spanked or physically abused by their parents or other adults. Some have parents who are bullies. Bullies often copy the behavior they see or experience at home.

Possibly because they don't know what to do, parents and other adults may ignore the behavior of bullies. Since they aren't disciplined, bullies learn it is okay to act aggressively towards others.

Schools may support bullying behavior without realizing it. Teachers and administrators may recognize and reward only certain groups of students. Athletes or scholars may get special attention. These schools lack an atmosphere of inclusion and cooperation. Bullies harass others because of their race, gender, ethnicity, physical attributes, sexual orientation, or personality characteristics.

Is my child a bully?

Bullying can be pushing, kicking, hitting, making threats, name calling, using sarcasm, spreading rumors, teasing, and/or humiliating others. Bullies try to control other children through words or physical means. Bullies plan to act in hostile and aggressive ways.

Both boys and girls are bullies. Boys tend to be physical. Girls are more indirect, such as spreading rumors or leaving a child out of activities. Bullying usually starts in the preschool or early school age years. It may start as

sibling rivalry when parents allow one sibling to bully his or her brother(s) or sister(s). It escalates during elementary school, and peaks during middle school. By late middle school or high school, many bullies are involved in criminal and gang behavior.

My child is a bully. What can I say?

If your child is a bully, tell him or her that you won't allow the bullying to continue. Tell your child:

- Stay away from the child or children you have harassed or bullied.
- You can't be with other children who are bullying with you.
- Go directly to school and come directly home. (If possible, make arrangements for an adult to go to and from school with your child).
- I (or another adult) will supervise you. If other children play in our home, you must play where I can see you.
- If you visit another child, I will call the child's parent to see if he or she is at home. You will be closely supervised.

How can I discipline my child?

Use positive discipline.

If you hit your child, be prepared for your child to hit others. Never use hitting or spanking as a punishment. If you have used physical punishment in the past, stop. Tell your child the new rule in the home, for all family members, is "no hitting." *Teach your child that hitting, pushing, and shoving others is never okay.*

Many parents find it helpful to take parenting education classes to learn how to discipline without hitting or spanking. Parents in the classes support each other as they learn new ways to discipline their children. Call your county UNH Cooperative Extension office and ask for information on positive discipline. Remember to consistently use positive discipline.

Use restoration.

If your child steals or damages another child's toys or clothes, have him or her restore them. Require your child to do additional chores to pay part or all of the cost of replacing the victim's property. Or, take away his or her allowance for several weeks to pay the cost. Say, for example, "You tore that child's jacket. Part of your allowance for the next few months will go to him so he can buy a new one."

Help your child develop empathy and caring.

Children who are bullies often lack a sense of empathy and caring. It's important they learn how their behavior affects others. Bullies begin to think about their behavior and the outcomes of their behavior when adults discuss situations and ask questions. Here are some examples of statements and questions you can use:

"You are a good kid. But it is wrong to shove and hit other students (children). Can you think why you might do this?"

"When you shove and hit Josh, he is afraid and in pain How do we know he feels that way?" (Help your child identify facial and physical signs that show how others feel.)

"Can you think of a time when someone hit or shoved you? Can you remember how you felt?"

"What could you do when you want to feel powerful (gain attention, have other kids like you, want something that another child has, or feel good), instead of hitting and shoving someone?"

"What could you do for Josh to help him feel better?"

“What do you think might happen if you continue to bully or harass other children?”

“What should be the consequence for your behavior? What will help you to not bully other children in the future? How can I (other adults, children) help you?”

Bullies often react rather than think about their actions. Parents can help their children to identify feelings and learn to control them. Parents need to encourage their children to think about their feelings, their action and the results of their behavior on others and themselves.

Bullies can learn to handle their feelings in ways that don't hurt others. However, changing the behavior of bullies takes time and effort.

Usually bullies lack social skills needed to make friends. Schools, social service agencies, and youth groups often conduct programs to help children gain empathy, caring, and positive social skills. Children need the help of a counselor or therapist if they bully because of anger, frustration, or depression..

If your child is a bully, get help for him or her immediately. Contact your community mental health center, a school guidance counselor or teacher, a member of the faith community, a leader in a community youth development program, or the family or youth development educator at your county UNH Cooperative Extension office.

Is my child being bullied?

Many children feel ashamed about being the target of a bully. They think they should be able to stand up for themselves. They may be afraid to tell their parents or other adults.

The following signs may indicate your child is being bullied:

- Makes up excuses to avoid going to school
- Grades drop
- Wants to be driven or walked to and from school
- Has torn clothes and bruises
- Needs extra money because he/she was robbed
- Is hungry after school because lunch, or lunch money, was stolen
- Shows fear, anxiety
- Sleep patterns change, or has nightmares
- Shows sadness and/or depression, talks of suicide
- Has headaches, stomach aches
- Has angry outbursts
- Withdraws
- Loses possessions. Toys, jacket or sneakers were stolen



My child is the target of a bully.

What can my child do?

Most bullies try to make excuses for hurting other children. Usually they think their target is different in some way and deserves to be bullied. For example, the victim “is short,” “is fat,” “is ugly,” “wears stupid glasses,” “is a brain,” “is the teacher’s pet,” “talks funny,” “looks funny,” “walks funny,” or “is stupid.”

Bullies pick on certain children for all kinds of reasons. Adults must help children understand they are not at fault if they become victims or targets of bullies. Children need to believe that differences among people are wonderful. Differences make us unique and interesting.

Targets of bullies do not need to change. Bullies need to change. Children who are bullied can act in ways to feel safer. Some examples include:

- If an adult is nearby to intervene, say, “Stop picking on me. I won’t be your target.”
- Say something unexpected. “I guess I’ll need to live with being stupid. But, wow, you’re one of the smart people in the world. Good for you!”
- Sit next to the bus driver on the bus.
- Be unpredictable. Go to your locker at different times during the day. Take different routes to and from school. Leave for school at different times. Even five minutes can make a difference.
- Stay with a friend or a group of friends as much as possible.
- Stay calm and don’t overreact when a bully confronts you. Maintain eye contact with the bully. Don’t look down or try to walk away.
- Don’t react aggressively by hitting or shoving the bully. This may work for some students. But, you may be seriously hurt, especially if the bully has a knife or gun.
- Join a club or youth group. Find a group of friends you enjoy spending time with.

What can I do?

Most parents and guardians feel angry when they learn their children are the targets of bullies. However, it’s important not to overreact. Instead, take positive steps to resolve the problem. Here are some suggestions:

- Look for the signs of bullying listed above.
- Ask your child directly if he or she is being bullied. Your child might feel ashamed or embarrassed and deny anything is wrong. To open a discussion, you might say the following: *Sometimes one child picks on other children. This happened when I went to school and it still happens today. It wasn’t right then, and it still isn’t right. Children who are picked on by bullies are not to blame. It is not their fault. It’s my responsibility and the responsibility of other adults to keep all children safe.* Parents must help their children understand that all children deserve the right to feel safe - at home, at school, and in their neighborhoods.
- Sometimes children who are targets of bullies feel alone. However, most bullies pick on more than one child. When victims learn they aren’t alone, they are more likely to discuss their problem.
- Walk or drive your child to and from school and other events. Or, arrange for another adult to do this.
- Arrange social times for your child when adults can supervise.
- Talk to your child about ways to keep safe. If possible, role-play with your child, what he or she could do when confronted by a bully.
- Organize parents in your community or the child’s school to stop the bullying. Involve community leaders or influential people in the anti-bullying movement.
- If bullying is taking place at school, talk to the teachers, school counselor, and/or administrators. Ask how you can help to stop bullying in the school and/or on the playground or campus.
- If school personnel are not responsive, remind them that schools are responsible for keeping students safe. You may need to talk to an attorney.
- If the bullying doesn’t stop, try to move your child to another school.



What can schools do to stop bullying?

Schools are responsible for keeping children safe. Many schools do this by introducing anti-bullying programs and policies. Some schools do this on their own. Others bring in a consultant to help them establish a safe, inclusive environment for children.

Here are some suggestions to help schools stop bullying behavior among their students:

- If bullying takes place in the school, admit that it does. Confront the situation as a problem to be addressed and resolved. Include representatives from many groups in problem solving. Include students, teachers, guidance counselors, administrators, parents, law enforcement agents, community leaders, and other members of the community.
- Develop a policy on bullying and aggressive/violent behavior. Include both the rules/expectations and the consequences for breaking the rules. Make sure that all children, their parents and guardians, and community members are aware of the policy. Review the policy on a regular basis to make sure it is relevant.
- Provide supervision in areas where bullying frequently takes place. Monitor bathrooms, hallways, and playgrounds. Volunteers from the community may be willing to help provide supervision.
- Establish conflict resolution and social skills programs.
- Intervene immediately to stop bullying. Talk to the bully. Let him or her know that sanctions outlined in the school policy will be implemented. Talk to the victim. Tell him or her that steps will be taken to prevent the bullying from happening again. Notify the parents of the bully and the victim. Tell them about the incident and the consequences. Keep them informed until the issue is resolved. Continue to keep the victim safe.
- Establish buddy systems between older and younger students.
- Establish bullying help lines so students can report acts of bullying without being identified.
- Provide counseling for bullies and their victims.
- Work to develop an atmosphere of respect and cooperation in the school. Make sure school personnel show respect to students, parents, guardians, and each other. Infuse the school's curriculum with concepts of peace, justice, human rights, tolerance, diversity, and non-violence.



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