

10 Things Parents Can Do to Help Eliminate Bullying

The latest research shows that **one in three children are directly involved in bullying as a perpetrator, victim, or both**. And many of those who are not directly involved witness others being bullied on a regular basis. No child is immune—kids of every race, gender, grade and socio-economic sector are affected. But it doesn't have to be this way. Parents have the power to help. Here are Education.com's top ten actions **you** can take to help address bullying:



Talk and listen to your kids every day.

Research shows that adults are often the last to know when children are bullied or bully others. You can encourage your kid to buck that trend by engaging in frequent conversations about their social lives. Spend a few minutes every day asking open ended questions about who he spends time with at school and in the neighborhood, what he does in between classes and at recess, who he has lunch with, or what happens on the way to and from school. If your child feels comfortable talking to you about his peers, he'll be much more likely to come to you when any bullying issues arise.

Spend time at school and recess.

Research shows that 67% of bullying happens when adults are not present. Schools often don't have the resources to monitor everyone and everything all the time, and need parents' help to prevent bullying. Whether you can volunteer once a week or once a month, you can make a real difference just by being present and helping to organize games and activities that encourage kids to play with new friends. Be sure to coordinate your on-campus volunteer time with your child's teacher and/or principal.

Be a good example of kindness and leadership.

Your kids learn a lot about power relationships from watching you. When you get angry at a waiter, a sales clerk, another driver on the road, or even your child, you have a great opportunity to model effective communication techniques. Don't blow it by blowing your top! Any time you speak to another person in a mean or abusive way, you're teaching your child that bullying is OK.

Learn the signs.

Most children don't tell anyone (especially adults) that they've been bullied, so it's important for parents and teachers to learn to recognize possible signs of being victimized. Signs might include frequent loss of personal belongings, complaints of headaches or stomachaches, avoiding recess or school activities, or want to get to school very late or very early. If you suspect that a child might be being bullied, talk with the child's teacher or find ways to observe his peer interactions to determine whether or not your suspicions might be correct. Then have a conversation with your child about what is going on at school.

Create healthy anti-bullying habits early.

Help develop anti-bullying and anti-victimization habits early in your kid, as early as preschool. Coach him on what *not* to do—hitting, pushing, teasing, or being mean to others. Have him consider how such actions might feel to the person on the receiving end (e.g. "How would you feel if that happened to you?"). These strategies can nurture empathy. Then, teach your kid the *do's*—kindness, empathy, fair play, and turn-taking are critical skills for good peer relationships. Children also need to learn how to say "no" firmly if they experience or witness bullying behavior. Give your child guidance about what to do if other kids are mean—get an adult right away, tell the bully to "stop," walk away, ignore him and find someone else to play with. It may help to role play what to do with your child so that he's confident that he can handle the situation.

Help your child's school address bullying effectively.

Whether your kid has been bullied or not, you should know what his school is doing to address bullying. Research shows that "zero-tolerance" policies aren't effective. What works better are ongoing educational programs that help create a healthy social climate in the school. This means teaching kids at every grade level how to be inclusive leaders, how to be empathic towards others, and teaching victims effective resistance techniques. If your school does not have effective bullying strategies and policies in place, talk to the principal and advocate for change.

Establish household rules about bullying.

Your child needs to hear from you explicitly that it's not normal or tolerable for him to bully, to be bullied, or to stand by and just watch other kids be bullied. Make sure he knows that if he is bullied physically, verbally, or socially (at school, by a sibling, in your neighborhood, or online) it's safe and important for him to tell you about it—and that you will help. He also needs to know just what bullying is, because many children may not understand that bullying is harmful. The healthy habits your practices at home will carry over to other settings.

Teach your child how to be a good witness or positive bystander.

Research shows that kids who witness bullying feel powerless and seldom intervene. However, kids who take action can have a powerful and positive effect on the situation. Although it's never a child's responsibility to put him or herself in danger, kids can often effectively diffuse a bullying situation by yelling "Stop! You're bullying," or "Hey, that's not cool." Kids can also help each other by providing support to the victim, not giving extra attention to the bully, and/or reporting what they witnessed to an adult.

Teach your child about cyberbullying.

Cyberbullying includes sending mean, vulgar, or threatening messages or images online, posting private information about another person, pretending to be someone else in order to make that person look bad, and intentionally excluding someone from an online group. We know from research that the more time a kid spends online, the more likely he is to be cyberbullied—so limit online time. There's a simple litmus test you can teach your child about online posting: if you wouldn't say it to someone's face or you would not feel comfortable having your parents see it—don't post it (or take it down immediately).

Spread the word that bullying should not be a normal part of childhood.

Some adults hesitate to act when they observe or hear about bullying because they think of bullying as a typical phase of childhood that must be endured or that it can help children “toughen up.” It is important for all adults to understand that bullying does not have to be a normal part of childhood. All forms of bullying are harmful to the perpetrator, the victim, and to witnesses and the effects last well into adulthood (and can include depression, anxiety, substance abuse, family violence and criminal behavior). Efforts to effectively address bullying require the collaboration of school, home, and community. Forward this list and articles you’ve read to all the parents, teachers, administrators, after-school care programs, camp counselors, and spiritual leaders you know. Bullying is a serious problem, but if we all work together, it’s one we *can* change.