



What Parents Can Do When Their Child is Victim of a Bully

Written by [Jen Watkins](#) on April 4, 2011

SOUTHERN UTAH – Many parents are concerned over what happens when their children go to school and feel helpless when they find out their children are victims of bullying.

Recently, a 15-year-old boy in Australia took matters into his own hands, body-slammimg his bully onto the concrete. As equally disturbing, many children were standing by, recording the incident as the bully taunted and hit the other boy. When the bully was slammed onto the ground, he appeared severely injured, but the other children continued to stand around and record instead of getting help.

St. George News asked experts around the country: What can parents do if their child is a victim of a bully?

Talk About Bullying

It can be hard to talk to children about sensitive topics. Sometimes we just want to say what first pops into our head, but that is not always the best answer to their questions. Whenever your child brings up the problem of being bullied, your first response is very important in the process of dealing with the situation. I'd like to show you some examples of how to respond, and first of all, how not to respond.

Do NOT say:

- Ignore them and it will eventually go away.
- They're just jealous, walk away from it. You're the best.
- Don't let them see that it bothers you. Stay tough!
- Just punch them in the face, it will show them who they're dealing with.

Although some of these comments still sound like they make sense, eventually they can make it worse. They also sound like a quick solution and don't send out the message that you truly care about the situation and that you're planning on dealing with this the very best way you can.

Do say:

- Thank you for sharing this with me, it must have been hard for you.
- Together we will find someone to talk to, and we will create a strategy for this to stop.
- You don't deserve to be treated this way and you didn't ask for this. We should work on this.

Assure your child that reporting bullying is not the same as tattling. Seeking for help is the most sensible thing and can add to any other strategies that you both come up with. Whether it is working on their self-confidence to prevent future bullying (this can be done through subtle changes of behavior) or working on making friends and eliminating the bullying from the inside out, seeking for help together is always a good starting point. Explain this to your child when the first signs of bullying occur and he or she will feel like your taking the problem seriously.

Debbie Vandeven, Author

<http://www.betterthanthebully.com>

3 Simple Tips for Parents

1) Give the child attention and get the facts of what is going on. This could take more than one interaction to get all of the facts.

2) Be supportive. It is amazing how many children report bullying to organizations like Survivors In Action and when questioned regarding their parent's response their answers are troubling. Many parent's either tell the child that it will pass or ignore the child all together in some instances. Since it is known that children of all ages that are bullied run risk for suicide attempts it is never a good idea to ignore the child. Parents need to make time to listen to their children and communicate with them.

3) Engage with other parents and school officials.

Alexis Moore, Author & Cyberstalking Expert

www.SurvivorsinAction.com

A Loss of Empathy Nationwide

We are seeing a loss of empathy in our kids nationwide. No longer are bullies just the big meanies who push you down in the hallway, bullying is a sophisticated form of relational aggression that impacts both boys and girls. Bullies need to be taught and must practice empathetic behaviors.

Parents can help their children tremendously by helping them role play situations and give the kids opportunities to practice their responses to being bullied. Targets need to learn NOT to show emotions in the face of bullying. They can have emotions, but they need to learn to control them. This internal strength will negate bullying behavior.

A parent's job is also to provide and create opportunities for the child to experience success socially and emotionally OUTSIDE of school. Making sure your child has opportunities to engage in activities with other "like-minded" individuals. Perhaps that is a karate class, a knitting co-op, summer camp, or a unique sport. Bullies are less likely to pick a target who is socially integrated in a group or who has a strong internal "sense of self."

A child needs to feel validated not only by his/her parents, but by other supportive adults who can recognize his/her value. These adults can be teachers, counselors, other family members, clergy, or others who understand that kids who "beat bullying" will experience a significant increase in self-worth, self-esteem, and social competence.

As those supportive adults, we can also help the "bystanders" become "upstanders." We do this by creating an environment of trust and confidentiality; bystanders must have no fear of social embarrassment—they must feel safe talking to you about the problem.

Most importantly, we can model the empathetic behaviors we want to see in our kids. We have to be the adults we want them to become.

Ariella Randle Rogge, Assistant Director/Program Director at Sanborn Western Camps
www.sanbornwesterncamps.com

Don't Quit

I am an expert only by experience. I have a 9 year old daughter that started to be bullied around 7 years old.

I talked to the teacher, I talked to the principal, had her tested for learning issues, talked to additional teachers, spoke to the parents and ended up pulling her out of the school 4 weeks before the school year ended and put her into a new school. Best decision we have made.

Push to find answers, don't quit, get counseling for your child, if you don't get a response then go to the next level of authority, if the final authority doesn't listen then get your child out of that environment as quickly as possible.

Karen Port, Mirage Spa & Recreation, Inc.
www.miragespa.com

Bullies Feed on Fear

When your child is being bullied, it is important for you to let your child know that bullying is unacceptable behavior. It is important that your child report any bullying to you and the school. It is imperative for the school to take a strong stance against bullying, and this means that many parents have to go to the school and advocate for their child if the school isn't taking enough action to ensure their child's safety.

Even when the school is working to stop bullying, sometimes it carries on. In this case, it is best for parents to encourage their kids to walk around with a buddy. If their buddy is with them

when a bully comes around, it is often easier to stand up to the bully, or the bully may walk away, because he wants your child to be alone. It is also important for your child to do his/her best to act brave. Bullies feed on the fear that they create in kids. If your child doesn't give off that fear, the bully may move on and leave your child alone.

Dr. Kenny Handelman, Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist
www.ADDADHDBlog.com

Get Involved

BE PROACTIVE

Discuss and rehearse with your child how they might respond to a bullying situation before it happens. Help your child come up with a list of responses to verbal aggression.

BUILD SUPPORTIVE SOCIAL NETWORKS

Bullies are predators and look for the easiest victim. Parents should support their child's efforts to be good at something. Expertise in any area raises a child's social currency among their peers thereby lowering the odds that they will become victims.

BE RESPONSIVE

If a parent senses that their child is being bullied they must investigate fully. If the suspicion is substantiated then a parent must be aggressive to take steps to stop the behavior. Avoid glib answers like, Just stand up to him and he will stop bullying you. Confronting a bully is not easy and often doesn't quite work out as smoothly as we would like.

Dr. Richard Horowitz, Parenting Coach & author of Family Centered Parenting
www.GrowingGreatRelationships.com

Diligence

As a result of diligent work by parents, many states now enforce laws, which require school districts to enact policies prohibiting the harassment, intimidation, or bullying of students.

Oftentimes, state laws require the districts' policies emphasize the importance of civil and respectful speech and conduct, and the responsibility of students to comply with the district's policy. Obviously, when a school district adopts such a policy, the policies must include provisions for an appropriate punishment.

When justified, the punishment should include expulsion and reporting of criminal activity to local law enforcement authorities. Even when a policy is in place, often school employees, volunteers, students, or administrators will not follow the district's anti-bullying policy.

When a district policy is not followed or in the absence of such a policy, after a child is bullied, parents should act immediately to ensure the district administers punishment. While it may seem obvious, first parents should provide notice to the school district that bullying is occurring. Second, to prevent future bullying, parents should speak with an attorney regarding how to encourage a school district to better enforce the school's anti-bullying policy. The attorney can also provide legal advice regarding the filing of a lawsuit on behalf of the child for the harm suffered.

Sean Brown, Attorney and Father
www.powerbrown.com

Signs of Being Bullied

Signs of being bullied may include reluctance to go to school, sleep disturbances, vague physical complaints, such as stomach pains or headaches. Look for unexplained belongings that are missing or clothes that are ripped.

If a parent suspects that their child is being bullied, it is best not to ask directly. Most children are afraid to report bullying for fear of being called a tattletale. Use indirect questions to child like "How do you spend your recess time?" "What's it like walking to school or being on the school bus?" or "Are there any children at school that are bullies?"

If parents also suspect their child is being bullied, they need to talk to the teacher to determine if their suspicions are correct. Ask the teacher to observe their child to determine their peer interactions. Often parents are the last to know when their child has been bullied or is the bully.

Dr. Andrea Weiner, Child Psychologist and Author
www.drandie.com

Don't Let it Snowball

If your child is being bullied at school (and that includes while going to school or coming back from school) you must immediately contact the school. Demand that the school act in a time bound and appropriate way (if the bully feels there are no consequences to the bullying, he or she will continue to bully).

If the bullying is of a nature that is threatening or otherwise, you may also have to contact law enforcement. The important thing is to not allow the bullying to escalate. In bullying there is a crowd mentality at work as well. Things only snowball if they are not addressed.

Ellen Pober Rittberg, Author of "35 Things Your Teen Won't Tell You So I Will"
www.ellenpoberrittberg.com

Help Children Cope with Bullying

Most parents want to protect their children from bad things. It is heartbreaking for any parent to hear their child's story about being bullied. However, often, there is debate and soul searching about what to do. Do you handle it? Do you encourage the child to fight back? Do you go to the school? Here are 3 ideas to help you decide a course of action.

Make it a habit to talk to your children daily about what was good and not so good about their day. Praise what they attempted to handle in a positive way and help them problem solve the rest. If talking about their day is routine in your house, it is more likely that your child will share with you that he or she is being bullied, if and when it does happen. Maybe they will share with you that another child is being bullied. Ask them how he/she feels about what happened. Empathize with and validate his feelings and emphasize that it is the adults' job to handle bullies.

If your child was bullied in school, insist that the school authorities handle it in such

a way that your child is not placed in jeopardy for having sought help. Suspension or expulsion is not sufficient. Bullies have deep seated problems which often involve their families. Counseling for the bully and his parents (where the bullying often starts) is essential.

Advocate for a school-wide campaign to respect each other's rights and differences.

Talk to the PTA about your child being bullied and get the support of teachers, administrators, and other parents for a school wide anti-bullying program. I recommend the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (<http://olweus.org>).

Kathryn Seifert, Ph.D.
www.preventbullyingnow.info

Don't React Emotionally

* When a parent first hears that their child is being bullied they are susceptible to any one of a number of visceral, emotional reactions. It is so important that the parent make a valiant effort to be aware of these emotions but not allow them to drive the parent to react impulsively and emotionally. Many parents will automatically react in a protective fashion and immediately want to "go after" the culprit. Others might have a different reaction-feeling shame that their child is "allowing" themselves to be victimized and berating the child for "bring this upon themselves."

Obviously, extreme reaction by a parent without conscious and deliberate thought can be harmful to the child and sabotage any efforts the parent may make to resolve the problem.

The first step is for the parent to assure the child that the parent will do whatever they can to protect the child and assist them in resolving the problem. The parent should share with the child that being victimized is "not your fault."

* The second step is for the parent to talk in a calm, loving manner with the child and obtain as much information as possible about the circumstances surrounding the bullying episodes. The parent's objective is to gain a complete picture as possible of the "where, what, when, why, how"

of the bullying incidents. Of course the parent should do this in an empathetic and sensitive fashion.

* The parent should realize that if they are going to be successful in intervening in the bully-victim process they need to take a comprehensive approach. If for example the bullying takes place on school grounds or in the vicinity of the school the parent will need to go to school and contact school authorities. They may have to talk to the parents of the bully. It is a stepwise, strategic process. Sometimes it is contraindicated for the parent to contact the parent(s) of the bully as the first step. They may be hostile or defensive. There are bullying situations where law enforcement has to be contacted. Sometimes the victim has to transfer to another school.

* The third step therefore is for the parent to analyze the situation and decide if they should contact the parents of the alleged bully directly or contact the school first. If for example they happen to be friends with the bully's parents they could consider to contact them first. In most instances, however, the parent should contact a school administrator with whom they feel most comfortable and trusting. It could be a counselor, a vice principal, or a veteran teacher.

* In sum, acting as an advocate for your child when they are a bullying victim is not often simple or straightforward. It is highly recommended that the parent request assistance from a third party who has had experience in addressing and resolving these types of conflicts. It could be a school worker, a therapist in the community who is experience in working with children or families, or it could be a family member who has had their own experience in solving this kind of problem.

Peter Geoff, Social Worker

Martial Arts

I can speak from personal experience since I went through that as a child. I was small, Asian and lousy at sports which made me an ideal target for the school bullies. Then I discovered martial arts. However, the martial arts training as a youth didn't just teach me about fighting, it also taught me a lot about discipline and actually ways to avoid violence.

The news got around the school by the time I was an intermediate level martial arts student and the bullies never targeted me again. So I never even had to use the fighting aspect to protect myself from the bullies in a fight as it was more of a deterrent now.

So I always advise all parents that martial arts training is one of the best investments they can ever make for their kids. They learn so much which impacts other areas of life. The discipline helps them become better students. Even the bullies can benefit as they learn respect for others.

Clint Cora, Speaker, Author & Karate World Champion
<http://www.clintcora.com>

Document Everything

* Never approach the bully's parents. This is a job for the school or the police (if outside of

school). Parents often can get offended when they hear bad things about their child. It needs to take place in a neutral environment. And going to their home could be considered trespassing and you could be arrested.

- * Document everything the bully is doing, dates, times, places, actions, etc.
- * Find out any threats that have been made toward your child, and if it pertains to outside of school; contact the police.
- * Contact the school during hours of operation and make an appointment with the principal for a face to face meeting.
- * Outline the details, not in an angry rant, but as if you were telling a friend what occurred.
- * Obtain a copy of the school's anti-bullying policy to determine if the bully violated a school policy.
- * When you meet with the school principal, tell your child's story and ask for help.
- * Relate the facts and leave your emotions out of it. If you feel the bully has violated the school's anti-bullying policy, bring this up calmly into the conversation.
- * Ask what you can do together to stop the bullying. Write down everything he said and agreed to do, because you are going to hold him accountable for it.
- * Send a thank-you letter to the principal, recapping what he or she said and agreed to do. This will put the principal on notice and on the alert that you are watching for a resolution to the problem.
- * Follow up with your child and the principal to see if the bullying stops.
- * If the bullying does not stop you should file charges with the school board and law enforcement if appropriate.

Ross Ellis, Founder and Chief Executive Officer Love Our Children USA

WWW.LOVEOURCHILDRENUSA.ORG

WWW.STOMPOUTBULLYING.ORG

Don't Forget to Check Their Facebook

Go to the child's school and have a meeting with the teachers, principal, counselors and social worker.

Parents need to make sure that the school administration knows that this is a serious problem. Encourage your child to speak with a counselor or psychotherapist regarding their feelings and thoughts.

Have the counselor or psychotherapist call the school and meet with the administration on your child's behalf.

Make sure that your child is safe at home.

Check their Facebook page and make sure they are not being cyber bullied.

If it is a persistent problem make sure that the school administration know that you will report it to the police.

If all else fails remove your child from that school and transfer him to a safer school.

School administration must be open to a professional coming in and addressing all issues that relate to a child physical, psychological and emotional safety.

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