

Bullying Part 2

By: Benjie Stern, PhD

If my child comes to me and tells me he is being bullied, what is the best thing to do?

Children often do not tell their parents that they are being bullied because they are embarrassed or frightened. As a parent, I would say let your child talk about it. If you suspect your child is being bullied or your child brings it up, consider these steps:

- **Talk with your child.** Focus on your child. Express your concern and make it clear that you want to help. Don't say, "What did you do that made them tease you?" That's a pit parents can fall into. Don't make the assumption that your kid has done something to bring on the teasing. Teasing isn't always logical, and for your kid it doesn't matter why—it just matters that it's happening.
- **Empathize with your child.** Say bullying is wrong, that it is not their fault, and that you are glad they had the courage to tell you about it.
- **Listen in a non-judgmental way** about your child and about the teaser. Let your kid do the talking.
- **Don't try to solve the problem.** Ask, "What happened? How did that make you feel?" to draw your child out. And try to find out more about the kid who's doing the teasing. Don't say, "Oh my God, what a rotten kid," because you're just getting a part of the story. Your child doesn't need you to go ballistic or take on the problem as your own. Your child needs to know that he's being heard and that his feelings matter. Once you've got the whole story out, depending upon what's happened, you can take your next step. For a parent to be explosive about the situation will cause a child to recoil. If a parent marches to school and confront the bully on the playground, the child is not going to feel safe telling me anything about this again, and it is the wrong way of handling the situation. We should not take on the battle for our children.
- **Work together to find solutions.** Ask your child what they think can be done to help. Reassure them that the situation can be handled privately.
- **Help your child develop strategies and skills for handling bullying.** Provide suggestions for ways to respond to bullying, and help your child gain confidence by rehearsing their responses. Ask him questions like, "What do you think you can say next time? What do you think might work?" Help your child see what the outcome might be of their words and actions; help them see that this is a problem they can solve on their own terms. It's also important to ask your child this question: "What's going to make you feel better about this situation?" But make sure you're not the one coming up with the solution. It's important that your child feels like they're solving the problem on his or her own terms. It's a skill you can teach them that will last a lifetime.
- **Be persistent.** Bullying may not be resolved overnight.
- **Stay vigilant to other possible problems that your child may be having.** Some of the warning signs may be signs of other serious problems. Share your concerns with a counselor at your child's school.

Working with Your Child's School

Parents are often reluctant to report bullying to school officials, but bullying may not stop without the school's help. Parents should never be afraid to call the school to report that their child is being bullied and ask for help to stop the bullying.

- **Open the line of communication.** Call or set up an appointment to talk with your child's teacher, principle, and/or school psychologist and establish a partnership to stop the bullying.
- **Get help for your child.** Seek advice from your child's guidance counselor or other school-based health professionals. They may be able to help your child cope with the stress of being bullied.

Empowering our children and feel that they can, as apposed to feeling powerless!

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