

**The Anti-Bully Tool Kit**  
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When one hears the word “bully”, a specific image comes to mind. A tough, mean student who teases, harasses and pushes around a more vulnerable peer. Everyone has experienced bullying to some degree, whether as a perpetrator, a victim or a bystander. Bullying unnecessarily traumatizes millions of children and adolescents every year. According to the U.S. Department of Justice, bullying is the most common form of violence in our society. Bullying affects a child's self-esteem but also his ability to be successful in school.

Bullying is defined as a spectrum of aggressive behaviors that ranges from overt acts of physical violence to more subtle – yet equally destructive – patterns of verbal abuse. If you suspect that your child is being bullied, look for the signs. These include withdrawal, reluctance to go to school, and physical problems such as headaches, stomachs and sleeping difficulties. It is important to ask open-ended questions. Don't just ask “How was your day?”. Try asking, “What kinds of things did you do a recess today?” or “What happened at lunchtime today?”. It is also helpful to share your own childhood experiences with being teased or bullied. Talk about how it made you feel and how you handled it.

Teach your child strategies to counter bullying. Counsel him to stand up for himself by saying “I don't like what you said/did”, to walk away or to use humor to diffuse the situation. Brainstorm about witty or humorous comebacks. Another positive intervention is to help your child role-play by reenacting the bullying and help him practice non-aggressive ways to handle it. Additionally, teach your child to think of positive images or statements about themselves to bolster self-esteem. Praise your child for appropriate social behaviors; catch him doing something good and offer positive reinforcement. Help your child foster positive social relationships. This may include helping him identify peers with whom he shares similar interests and finding activities that your child enjoys and does well. Finally, teach your child preventative tactics such as reporting aggressive, abusive behavior and staying near friends and adult supervisors.

It is vital that the school be informed if your child is being bullied. Most schools have a no-tolerance policy and many have anti-bullying programs in place. School personnel and licensed educational psychologists can also be helpful in assisting your child develop the skills to manage bullying behavior.