

Signs of Regression

A parent's checklist for noticing when bullying is affecting your child, even when they can't say so directly.

Kids rarely walk up and say "I'm being bullied." More often, it shows up sideways: a skill that quietly disappears, a habit that starts out of nowhere, a kid who used to talk your ear off and suddenly doesn't. This checklist is not a diagnosis. It's a way to start paying attention on purpose, so you can catch a pattern instead of dismissing a bad day.

How to use this

Check anything that has been true for two weeks or more, or that represents a real change from how your child used to be. One box checked might be nothing. Several boxes checked, especially across different categories, is worth a closer look and a conversation.

Academic Signs

- ☐ A grade or subject has dropped without a clear reason
- ☐ Homework that used to get done now gets "forgotten" or avoided
- ☐ A skill they had mastered (reading, math facts, handwriting) has slipped backward
- ☐ Sudden reluctance to go to school, especially on specific days
- ☐ Teacher comments about distraction or disengagement that are new this year

Behavioral Signs

- ☐ New aggression or meltdowns that don't match their usual pattern
- ☐ Increased clinginess, especially around drop-off or transitions
- ☐ Regression in self-care skills they'd already mastered (dressing, feeding, toileting)
- ☐ Acting out specific words or scenarios that don't sound like their own
- ☐ New rituals around avoiding certain places, people, or times of day

Emotional Signs

- ☐ Increased anxiety, especially on Sunday nights or before school
- ☐ A drop in confidence about things which made them feel good
- ☐ Crying, shutting down, or going quiet with no clear trigger
- ☐ Talking about themselves in harsher terms than they used to
- ☐ New fears that seem to have appeared out of nowhere

Social Signs

- ☐ Withdrawal from friends or activities they used to enjoy
- ☐ No longer mentioning specific classmates they used to talk about

- ☐ Sudden changes in who they sit with, walk with, or play with
- ☐ Avoiding group chats, texts, or social media they used to check often
- ☐ Reluctance to attend events they used to look forward to (parties, field trips, recess)

Physical Signs

- ☐ Frequent stomachaches or headaches with no medical explanation
- ☐ Changes in sleep: trouble falling asleep, nightmares, or waking early
- ☐ Changes in appetite
- ☐ Unexplained marks, torn clothing, or missing belongings
- ☐ A new flinch or sensitivity to being touched

If you checked several boxes

Start writing things down. Date, what happened, what your child said if anything. You don't need a perfect system, a notes app or a notebook by the door is enough. A pattern on paper is much harder for a school to wave away than a feeling in your gut.

Before You Go

This checklist will help you notice. It will not tell you what to do once you have noticed, how to document it so it holds up, or how to walk into a meeting and advocate without losing your nerve. That is a different job, and it takes more than one page.

If this checklist felt familiar, my ebook, *Afraid to Ask, Ashamed to Fight*, walks you through what comes next: how to document what you're seeing so it holds weight, how to bring it to your child's school without losing your footing, and how to use your child's IEP or 504 plan as real protection instead of paperwork in a drawer.

Nancy Perkins, LMSW, is a licensed social worker and special education advocate, and the mother of a now-adult son with autism. She wrote this guide for parents who are afraid to ask and ashamed to fight, so they don't have to stay either.

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