

What to Do About Bullying

Bullying is any unwanted, aggressive behavior that involves a real or perceived power imbalance. It can range in intensity from mild taunting to physical violence, and it comes in three main forms:

- **Verbal:** teasing, name-calling, inappropriate comments or threats of violence
- **Social:** excluding someone on purpose, telling other children not to be friends with someone, spreading rumors, embarrassing someone in public
- **Physical:** hitting, kicking, pinching, spitting, tripping, pushing

Bullying happens before, during and after school, and increasingly, it happens online. Isolation from peers, changes in behavior, and loss of interest in previously enjoyable activities can all be signs a child is dealing with bullying.

If you suspect your child is being bullied, try to talk directly with the other child's parents, as well as teachers and school counselors. It's a good check in with other parents and school personnel regularly.

Tips to prevent bullying:

- Encourage kids to make friends. Building friendships is a skill — the more they practice, the better they will get. A solid, supportive peer group goes a long way toward smoothing social ups and downs.
- Coach children to consider how their words and actions might affect others. Set expectations early and listen to how they interact with their friends.
- Hostility between siblings can have lasting consequences. Don't tolerate aggression at home.



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What if my child IS the bully?

“Parents often believe being kind and respecting others is instinctual, but it’s not automatic,” says pediatric psychologist Natalie Walders Abramson, PhD. “Kindness and respect require conscious effort and coaching from adults.”

It can be hard to accept your child is bullying others, but it happens. Here’s how to prevent it — and stop it if it starts.

- **Connect with the school.** Check in with teachers and administrators. Let them know you care as much about their behavior with peers as you care about their academic and athletic pursuits.
- **Network with parents.** Get connected to parents in your child’s peer group. Notice conflicts emerging among kids and try to support them if relationships start to sour.
- **Set an example.** Model being a friend. Nurture your friendships and show kids how you respond when someone needs support.
- **Increase supervision.** If your child is involved in bullying, be vigilant, particularly of their online activities and cell phone use.
- **Celebrate the good.** Bullying is not acceptable, and parents should make that clear. But make sure also to notice what your child is doing right, and praise them when they treat others in safe, respectful and appropriate ways.

Learn more about bullying, mental health, and how the Pediatric Mental Health Institute can help your child. Visit childrenscolorado.org/mentalhealth or call 720-777-6200.



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